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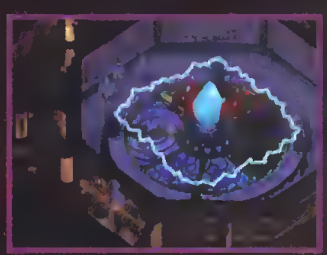

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REALMS OF FANTASY

COVER: Spanish artist Luis Royo delivers all things fantastic with Memory in White *(1993). ABOVE: Come take a closer look at the giant Gallery of fantasy artist James Warhola.* *See page 68.*

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DEL REY

Your Muse Is Calling— Let the Machine Pick Up.

AS I WRITE THIS I'VE JUST RETRIEVED my kids from their last day of school. (As you read it, you're probably thinking about shopping for school supplies, but that's the magic of magazine lead time for you!)

Anyway, unlike most mothers, I desperately look forward to summer vacation. I don't care that my kids are sitting around the house like bumps on logs (when they're not falling off their bikes and breaking their arms, that is...). I care that I GET TO SLEEP LATE! Don't get me wrong—school is a necessary and marvelous institution. We do need to teach the little sweeties how to read and write and torment the weak among them. Why, however, do we have to begin the process at 8 in the morning? Who can learn anything at that hour? We're not even allowed to give them a cup of coffee or two to get them started. A sensible school day would begin around 10 and run til 4. Gives us all a chance to wake up and stretch and remember if this is gym clothes day or funny hat day. (It's horrible when you get the two confused—trust me on this.) Anyway, given the fact that I am what they call an Owl, and my kids are forced by an unfeeling society to become Larks, you can imagine that there are certain conflicts that they face every weekday morning when confronted at 7 A.M. by a mother who has gone to bed only six hours earlier.

So given the fact that at the moment I'm blissfully looking forward to 10 weeks of getting enough sleep, you'd think that I'd be raring to go—full of energy to write a cogent and insightful Editorial, one that will have the *cognoscenti* chattering over cappuccino for months to come. Uh uh. Another side effect of summer vacation is the sudden attack of the laters, as in: The porch swing looks so inviting, I'll write my editorial later... And then of course when you sit down to write said editorial, you can think of nothing to say except that your roses are looking particularly fine this summer but that your tomatoes have blossom drop. See where I'm going with this? I've pretty much played out the survey for now, though I did get three good Editorials out of it, and given the heat, humidity, and general torpidity of a day in late June, I'm unable to get my brain in gear t think of a worthy topic Thus I think I'll fall back on an old stand-by. I can assuage my conscience by reminding myself that readers ask these questions at an alarming rate, no matter how many times I answer them, and now that you're all out of school and rested up too, I'll be seeing tons of stuff from you and I want you to have at least a sporting chance of getting it published.

So, at long last, here's the real Editorial: How can you sell a story to this magazine? Well, first of all, you get the address right. You don't send it to Virginia or to Illinois or (God forbid) to my Email account. You send it to PO Box 572, Rumson, NJ, 07760. Second of all, you type it in a decent-sized typeface and double-space it on real bond paper, not on onion skin. Third of all, you enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope large enough for either the return of your story or the return of a rejection slip. If you want us to dispose of the story, write this on the first page of your manuscript. Fourth, you must include your name and address on the first page of the manuscript, and on each succeeding page you need to have your last name/title in the upper right-hand corner. This will protect your story from comingling with other lesser stories in the case of a tragic story-stack collapse in our offices.

Pretty easy, huh? Just follow these simple steps and you too will be published, right? Wait, not so fast. Here comes the hard part. The story must be c rrectly spelled and punctuated and you must have a more than rudimentary familiarity with the basics of English composition and grammar. And now the really hard part: The story must be about something, it must have a new and interes' ng idea, it must have characters we care and a plot that draws us in, and all the ings that you don't even notice wh e reading a good story, but of w' ust be hyperaware when you're t one.

have it: Follow these few sim- fore you know it, I'll be read- cript on my porch swing, so 'on't even notice abundance ck of tomatoes. Have a great

—Shawna McCarthy

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VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1

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Editorial Director

SHAWNA MCCARTHY
Editor

STEPHEN VANN
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CHRISTINA KRÜG
Assistant Art Director

REBECCA MCCABE
Assistant Editor

BRIAN MURPHY
Editorial Assistant

PATRICIA A. ALLEN
LAURA CLEVELAND
Copy Editors

Contributors:
Tanith Lee, Charles de Lint, J.K. Potter, Noreen Doyle, Terri Windling, Gahan Wilson, Nigel Suckling, Dan Persons, Judith Berman, Richard Parks, S.N. Dyer, Mary O'Keefe Young, Carol Heyer, Annie Lunsford, Web Bryant, Paul Salmon, Ken Graning, Stephen Johnson, Tom Canty, Jane Yolen, John Berkey

DIANE BONIFANTI
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AMANDA ZELONES
Finance Manager

KELLY KING
Circulation Consultant

CARI WYNNE
Production Assistant

ALI LORAINE
Production Assistant

STEVE DORBOWSKI
Circulation Manager

WARNER PUBLISHER SERVICES
International Distribution

Newsstand Consultant
ARTHUR O'HARE

Advertising Offices:
JOE VARDA
Advertising Director

KATE CHAPMAN
Advertising Assistant

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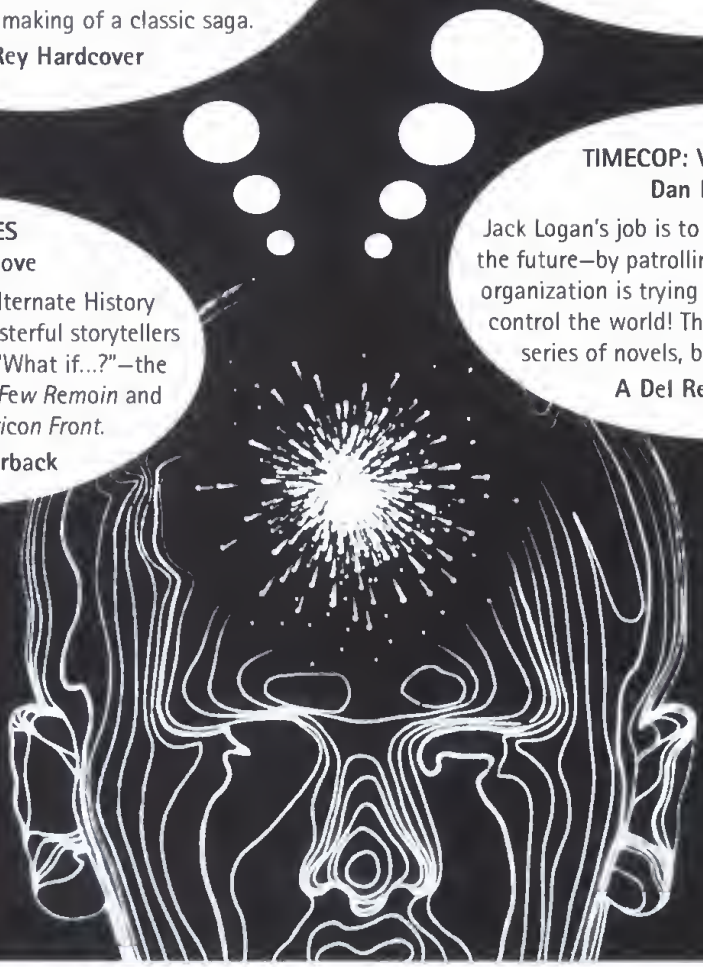

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DEL REY

Dear *Realms:*

Wanted to say *thanks* to all for your kind treatment of me at *Realms*. While I've published in/sold to all sorts of commercial places since you first included me, I am especially proud of the treatment "Redgunk" has received at *Realms*, my bios, photos, the tremendous top-of-the-genre illustrations, and your inclusion of the very encouraging letters from readers. If you get a chance to read additionally, hope you'll look for "Redgunk" in a soon-upcoming *Amazing Stories*. And if you have some listening time, Kris Rusch and Martin Greenberg are including "Meadowsong" (from *Realms*) in their audio book *Year's Best Fantasy: 1997*.

Bill Eakin
Clarksville, AK

Thanks for the kind and gracious words, Bill. Sometimes the editorial staff only hears from the writers who feel rejected and angry—it's great to receive a positive and happy letter from an author we have been able to publish. Contrary to the widely held belief that the staff here at Realms *lives to ruin lives, misdirect fortunes and ignore and insult the next greatest fantasy author on Earth, we actually much prefer to send writers (and artists) a signed contract than a form rejection.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have been enjoying your magazine for some time, but Ms. Haugen's letter (April '98) provoked me to write. I am a Christian who enjoys a wide variety of fantasy and wish to respectfully refute her. Christians were not the *first* ones to have the idea of evil and a specific evil one. The Jews and the Zoroastrians had these ideas long before the birth of Christ. Even before that, the Egyptians had Set and the Norsemen had Loki, cruel gods of darkness and chaos. As long as a writer has a good story to tell, I am not interested whether or not it involves good vs. evil. And as they say, sometimes the dragon wins.

On another note, I enjoyed "Good Help Is Hard to Find" (Dec. '95) "The God at Midnight" (June '96) and "Lost Girls" (Feb. '98) was so excellent I intend to buy the whole book. I did notice that the June *Realms* was awfully DARK, more like what you would expect from an October issue! Perhaps you need a spin-off horror magazine? Or maybe you could add some special summer or bonus issues?

I also would like to say I enjoy the Gallery articles and particularly Carol Heyer's illustrations. Would you please do a Gallery on Sue Dawe? I love her paintings but have been unable to get her artwork at all since Landmark/Sterling Specialties stopped making her calendar this year. As for those whiners who do not like the cover art. I have noticed that many of them have been book covers first. So my suggestion would be to get home delivery of *Realms* and glue the protective cover wrapper to the front.

Keep up the great work!

Every blessing,

Diane McCarty
Bethel Park, PA

We really appreciate a letter that touches upon everything from letters, cover art, interior artwork, Gallery, and fiction—to the suggestion for increasing our issues! Not to mention, due to space factors we had to trim Diane's thoughtful and comprehensive letter a wee bit. We are flattered to know there is a Realms *reader who literally enjoys the magazine from cover to cover!*

Dear Editor,

I am writing to you about your story "Protocols of Consumption," by Robert Charles Wilson (June '98). I found the story to be both moving and disturbing. I am glad you had the courage to print it. It painted a very real portrait of the way mentally ill people are treated.

For me, the disturbing part is that the story was so accurate it need not be called fantasy. It made me think of my own personal experience with counseling. Dr. K. was very real. I just wanted people to know how moving and close to reality the piece actually was.

Frances Beziaj
Chicago, IL

Dear Shawna:

After reading your last issue (my first), I began to ponder why it is that I love fantasy. It is not especially what fantasy has, but instead, what other books are lacking. Let me explain: People complain and fret about the environment, the ocean, the ozone, and the rainforest. The real problem is not the actual destruction of the Earth but the reason behind this destruction. It is a true lack of feeling, sense, and soul. We are a world without soul. When the world was young we mostly took just what was needed to survive. Now we are greedy and take more than we need, by force or otherwise. Fantasy takes me back to a simpler, more innocent place where a soul can still exist in peace with the Earth.

Ever understanding,

Kelly A. Ruth
Buford, GA

Dear *Realms*,

Ordinarily you folks run a tight ship. But your June issue listed two stories on the wrong pages and completely omitted Janni Lee Simner from the contributor page. "Steel Penny" was good and I would like to know something about the author.

Mark Harkins
Pasadena, TX

Sorry Janni! Janni Lee Simner grew up on the east coast, but now makes her home amid the saguaro and cholla of the Arizona desert. She has published more than two dozen short stories for children and adults, including forthcoming appearances in A Glory of Unicorns *and* Not of Woman Born. *"Steel Penny" is her second sale to* Realms. *Her first three novels,* Ghost Horse, The Haunted Trail, *and* Ghost Vision, *were published by Scholastic. She lives with her husband and fellow writer Larry Hammer, cats Tia and Kiki, and an ever-expanding number of books.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

I have just finished reading the June issue of *Realms*. I was disappointed in the way you used a Frank Frazetta look-alike cover to hint there was a traditional fantasy story inside. (No, I didn't bite. I realized this was artwork for the *Tarzan* report.) This is not the first time I've read your colorful magazine. At first I was joyous. Here was a publication in full color on slick paper, something worth reading. But the magazine changed—shifted toward the "literary." The June '98 issue tells me there's nothing left in *Realms* for me as a reader or an author.

Sincerely,
Richard W. Ramsden
Naples, FL

Can't get anything past you Mr. Ramsden—we've been sneaking quality literature into our magazine just to upset you.

Hello Ms. McCarthy,

I enjoy *Realms of Fantasy* very much. I especially enjoy the artwork and the glossy cover art. The other "fantasy" magazines that I am familiar with print less art, or in most cases, no art except on the covers. This is just one of the many reasons I look forward to each new issue of your magazine. Any chance the magazine will break out of the bimonthly format and become a monthly publication?

Sincerely,
R.L. Garanson
Honolulu, HI

Your comments are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, e-mail to: shawnam896@aol.com

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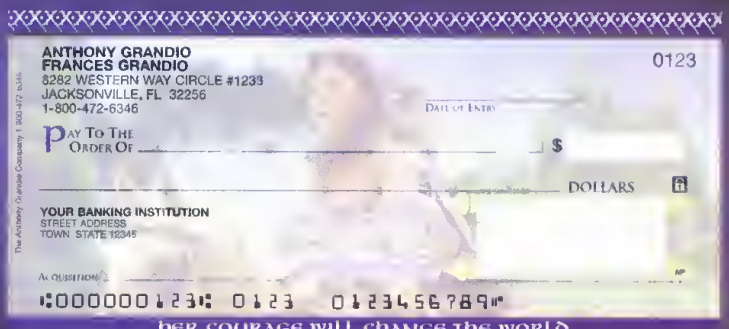

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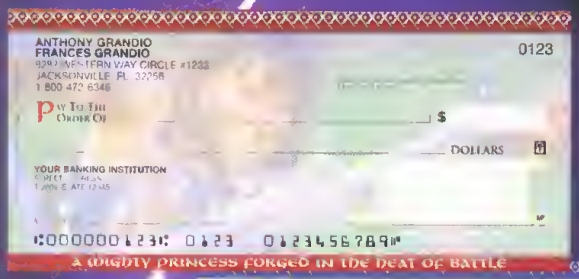

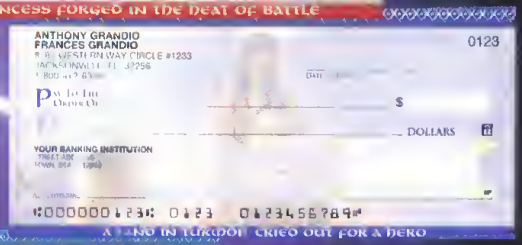

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BY GAHAN WILSON

Walk Cthulhu's realm or see fantasy become reality, either way, consider yourself warned.

I HOPE, FOR THEIR SAKES, THAT MOST AUTHORS I HAVE KNOWN HAVE NOT (OR WILL NOT) survive after death in a sentient form. It will not go well for them if they do even if they land in Heaven because, being authors, they will be unable to resist peeping through the golden bars of that final retirement city and to peer over the filmy edges of the clouds surrounding it in order to anxiously scan the living world which they have left in order to see how their posthumous careers are faring.

The vast majority, no matter how renowned and venerated in life, will most certainly be appalled to discover that within a decade or two at most all their works and vaunted reputation have—save for the specialists and the more determined collectors—vanished altogether from the scene.

Oh to be sure there may be a little huddle of their stuff on some esoterically inclined bookseller's shelf; a few of their most widely published volumes may survive in rebound form in the stacks of larger libraries whose reduced civic support have procrastinated any recent winnowing; here and there an elderly lover of old things largely forgotten may even give a work of theirs some special place in their private collection, but it will be obvious to the dead author observing these tiny survivals that all have the mark of doom upon them and that soon even these sad little remnants of dimming recollection will fade away.

Below: The Cthulhu mythos has spread far and wide inspiring both writers and artists alike to take up pen or brush and pay homage. (Painting by Bob Eggleton.)

If there is an author who might be able to sustain the impact of such an afterlife experience with equanimity, if not actually view it with droll amusement, it would be the Irish writer, Edward John Morton Drax Plunkett, otherwise known as Lord Dunsany. He was a towering master of the ironic but his profound understanding of it did not come from contempt, it rose from compassion. He looked directly at terrible truths concerning our human condition and saw the poetry and the humor in them as very few others have. Never fear, if Edward John Morton Drax Plunkett somehow did survive his corporeal collapse you may be sure he is up to handling his present situation.

In his life he was hugely celebrated by all the literate, English-speaking world. Book after book came out to rave reviews and sold edition after edition, and when he ventured into the theater at the urging of no less a patron than William Butler Yeats he succeeded so blazingly well that at the apogee he had the astounding count of *five* plays running on Broadway to SRO audiences.

Alas this is all gone, long gone, and in our day and age (which will also be long gone before you know it) it is a rare thing to come across a book of Lord Dunsany's. Away back in the late sixties and early seventies, Lin Carter, in his now legendary Adult Fantasy Series for Ballantine Books, did a fine job of reissuing some of Dunsany's best fantastic novels and short stories but this burst of visuality was followed by another decade or so of total obscurity and it is only now that Chaosium, Inc.—the company that brought and is bringing you my favorite roleplaying game, *Call of Cthulhu* (which you cannot play without accumulating insanity points!)—has hired S.T. Joshi to edit and introduce *The Complete Pegana—All The Tales Pertaining To The Fabulous Realm of Pegana* (Chaosium, Inc., Oakland CA; 239 pages; paperback; $12.95).

The book is made up of *The Gods of Pegana* and *Time and the Gods* and a selection of stories from Dunsany's *Tales of Three Hemispheres* wherein Pegana is visited by its creator (because, of course, none other than Dunsany,

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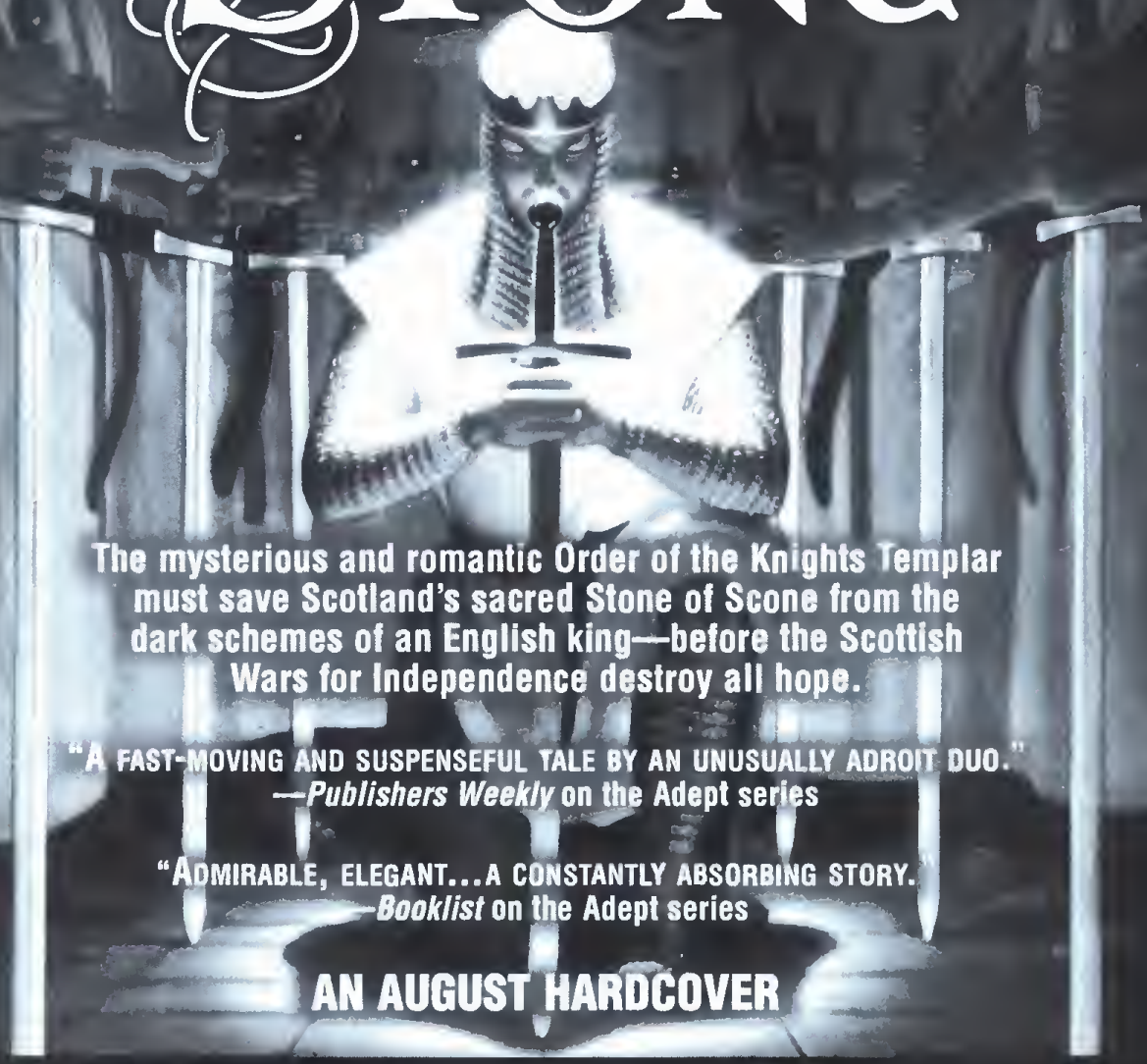

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himself, is *the* God of Pegana!) for the last time and is put to rest and gently left behind.

The first edition of *The Gods of Pegana* was printed by Dunsany at his own expense (one of the advantages of being a Lord, at least in those days, was a good chance of having a little spare cash around) but it met with such great success that the author had no difficulty at all in finding a publisher for its subsequent editions and for all his other books.

The Gods of Pegana is a wonderfully sustained exercise in totally ironic fantasy which may never be beaten. Speaking in a highly original mix of King James Bible English, Yeatsian syntax, and Scheherazadian imagery, he introduces us to a wonderfully sinister Valhalla populated with mad, spectacularly cruel and sublimely silly gods who plot against one another with the determined persistence of corporate executives and whose only genuine amusement appears to derive from the inventive damage they inflict upon their misbegotten worshippers.

Among these gods by far the most important is the sleeping Mana-Yood-Sushai because the other gods, for all their self-importance and appalling powers, are only his dreams and will vanish when he wakes. This includes such august and altogether terrifying types as Kib, who created Earth and made humankind from animals (essentially, it would seem, to give himself and the other gods something funny to laugh at); Sish, who created time (and therefore decay); Mung, the Lord of Death, and Roon, the god of going, who may well be the most powerful of all save Mana-Yood-Sushai since:

It is because of Roon that the worlds are never still, for the moons and the worlds and the comet are stirred by the spirit of Roon, which sayeth: "Go! Go! Go!"

Here are a few more quotes given in order to pass on at least a little something of the flavor of this marvelous book, these ones being descriptions of a few smaller, far more pleasant gods, those of the hearth:

... Pitsu, who stroketh the cat: Hobith, who calms the dog; and Habaniah, the lord of glowing embers; and little Zumbiboo, the lord of dust; and Gribaun, who sits in the heart of the fire to turn the wood to ash ...

Among other sorts of lesser entities the most touching by far is Jabim:

... the lord of broken things, who sitteth behind the house to lament the things that are cast away. And there he sitteth lamenting the broken things until the worlds be ended, or until someone cometh to mend the broken things. Or sometimes he sitteth by the river's edge to lament the forgotten things that drift upon it.

Time and the Gods is the second and final book in the Pegana series and in it Dunsany's irony takes on a sharper edge. The gods are more harshly observed in their foolishness and the state of the human wretches living at their sufferance is examined at more length and with more attention to detail than before. None of this diminishes in any way the continuing poetry, and the compassion

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underlying the irony does not falter.

The last three tales taken from another collection are Dunsany's graceful leave-taking of his fable and they progress through a decidedly Machenesque pattern. In the first story faerie blends into reality, in the second reality blends into faerie, and the third is a synthesis which brings to mind a quote cited in Joshi's introduction wherein Dunsany explains how his seeing a hare in a garden led to his becoming a writer:

If ever I have written of Pan, out in the evening, as though I had really seen him, it is mostly a memory of that hare. If I had thought that I was a gifted individual whose inspirations came sheer from outside earth and transcended common things, I should not write this book; but I believe that the wildest flights of the fancies of any of us have their homes with Mother Earth.

Many an excellent author has freely admitted studying Pegana to great advantage. Because of the intensely idiosyncratic style in the series a number of these authors have produced some pretty embarrassing stuff in the process of assimilation, *but* if that stage is somehow gotten through, the *Satori* induced by sincere and prolonged meditation upon Pegana and its lessons has produced some truly outstanding results.

It would be a cruel thing for anyone who loves fantasy to live out their entire lives and miss reading the Pegana tales of Lord Dunsany. Pray do not let it happen to you!

Here's another offering from the folks at Chaosium, this one being a new and improved version of the Lovecraftian Encyclopedia they brought out back in 1944. Unlike many books that claim to having been expanded and revised, *The Encyclopedia Cthulhiana—Expanded and Revised Second Edition* (by Daniel Harms; Chaosium, Inc., Oakland, CA; 423 pages; paperback; $14.95) really and truly is. Daniel Harms must be a glutton for punishment since he's swollen the thing from 274 to 423 pages; tossed in a useful time line of the Cthulhu Mythos which in 20 fun-packed pages starts us out from away back when the Earth was still cooling and brings us all the way up to the still-far-distant future when "the last inhabitants of Earth burrow and cling to the insides of a dying planet" and generously added on to "infamous" (my word, not theirs) *Necronomicon* appendices: History, Locations, and Contents.

Another thing Harms has done is to present a nicely organized and—I feel—very fair account of what the Cthulhu Mythos is and how it grew. Also, as if all this were not enough, the book is peppered with sinister little drawings of obviously dangerous magical sigils and symbols including variations of the Elder Sign, Sign of the Dark Mother, the Seal of R'lyeh and nothing less than the Pnakotic Pentagon. Mess with these last items at your own risk!

A good and conscientious job, I am sure the *Encyclopedia Cthulhuliana* will be around for years to solve many an argument, open many a door and be of extraordinary value to fledging horror authors trying to work their way through the Lovecraft pastiche we all must write or die.

Far more dangerous than even the above entry is *The R'lyeh Text* (with an introduction by Colin Wilson; Skoob Books Publishing Ltd. London; 175 pages; paperback; $11.95), a hair-raising grimoire "researched, transcribed and annotated" by Robert Turner. This book is a follow-up to *The Necronomicon*; *The Book of Dead Names* (now reprinted by Skoob, also for $11.95) which was originally brought out back in 1977. That book was (and is) a marvelously unique anthology edited by George Hay, also introduced by Wilson and "researched" by Robert Turner, then working with David Langford. It includes pieces by such varied luminaries as L. Sprague de Camp, Christopher Frayling, and Angela Carter. It was, in my opinion, absolutely and by all odds the best of a spate of *Necronomicon* take-offs that appeared during that period and its contributors, particularly Wilson, left a trail of diverse hints that has managed to stylishly strew lasting confusion among Lovecraftian scholars ever since.

The heart of *The Necronomicon* was an "excerpt" from Lovecraft's imaginary (...?) book of the same name, the tome of tomes, the boss grimoire of the whole Cthulhu cycle. It was introduced with a detailed and marvelously convincing account by Langford describing how he used a computer to

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unravel the strange cipher *Liber Logaeth* also known as the *Liber Mysteriorum* which had been left behind by the Elizabethan Magus, Dr. John Dee.

Dee is more commonly remembered for his disturbing delvings into what he called Enochian magic which resulted in the revelation of an angelic language that has caused generations of philologists to scratch their heads in puzzlement. Lovecraft included Dee in his history of the *Necronomicon* as the author of its English version "Made Plaine from THE ARAB" which was so helpful to young Wilbur Whateley in the tending of his terrible twin.

Langford's decipherments are then reconstructed "with certain necessary additions" by Robert Turner who is a genuine, bona fide student of the occult and an author of highly respected (and very readable) books on Elizabethan magic and related topics. The result is no less than 18 wonderfully creepy chapters of as convincing a fragment of the *Necronomicon* as the pickiest Lovecraftian could hope for.

Detailed information is given on how to arrange monoliths, mix magical powders, fashion rune-laden scrimitars, and make doomish fending signs in case some arrival summoned from "between the spaces we know" turns out to be even more formidable than one expected, though I very much fear sheer luck would be all that one could *really* count on if one were foolish enough to call forth such as Yog-Sothoth or Shub-Niggurath ye Black. For those inclined to lurch into dreadful dangers, however, Turner generously provides all instructions, including words of power, awe-inspiring sigils, potent perfumes, and terrifying talismans.

The R'lyeh Text is a sequel to the first book and I admit I involuntarily barked out a startling peal of fiendish laughter when I opened the little volume in a Los Angeles bookstore (the perfect place to come across such a find) and discovered it presented an eagerly awaiting world with no less than 11 (a really big number with Aleister Crowley, 11 ...) new chapters, each one packed with delightfully dreadful new ceremonies with lavishly detailed tips on how to construct and consecrate all apparatus required!

In his Prologue Turner informs us that he came across this new bounty because of advancing technology (computers have come a long way since the seventies) and the "utilization of a complex transposition-grid based on alpha-numeric ligatures." Say that last three times in a row quickly without tripping up your tongue and I figure you deserve a peek at any Lovecraftian deity you wish.

A selected listing of chapter headings ought to give you a feel for the gentle flavor of this little book of instruction:

XIX THEIR HIDDEN PLACE

XXI THE NURTURING OF THE CADAVER

XXV OF THE DEAD WHO REST NOT IN THEIR TOMBS & OF ATTENDANT & FAMILIAR SPIRITS

Does that indicate *The R'lyeh Text* will show you a good old time or what, boys and girls?

Among the many helpful hints provided by this new expansion of the Mad Arab's manual of the marvelously morbid are full instructions on exactly how to go about making your very own Amulet of Nodens along with the firm assurance that these babies really provide solid protection "against the fiends that walk the night; the demonic adversaries that assail mankind," and you know we need as much of that sort of thing that we can get, especially in this day and age.

Of course, that's only for starters as you also get a complete work-up on how to build a brazen head (which you can chat with any time you want to by simply removing its veil, turning its face to the North and chanting in as impressive a tone as possible: "I have fashioned you with my art, I have given you life, Now answer in truth!") or fashion the Ring of Hypnos (helps you peek in on other folks' dreams), or put together a magical scrying mirror otherwise known as the Speculum of Apparitions (comes in very handy for viewing souls of the dead or spirits called forth when not evoked to visible appearance). And, like I said—that's only for starters!

A marvelously funny and creepy send up. Others have tried to pull this sort of thing off but in his section of *The Necronomicon* and in *The R'lyeh Text*, Turner shows

Books to Watch For

Isaac Asimov's Camelot, *edited by Gardner Dazois and Sheila Williams, Ace; paperback, $5.99.* A book of fabled Camelot featuring Nebula award-winning authors Roger Zelazny, Esther M. Friesner, and Michael Swanwick. Ten marvelous tales of fantasy's most famous kingdom. Merlin, Arthur and Lancelot are brought forth from the mythical past to intrigue the reader in this spellbinding collection. Also features stories by *Realms* favorites Tanith Lee and Jane Yolen.

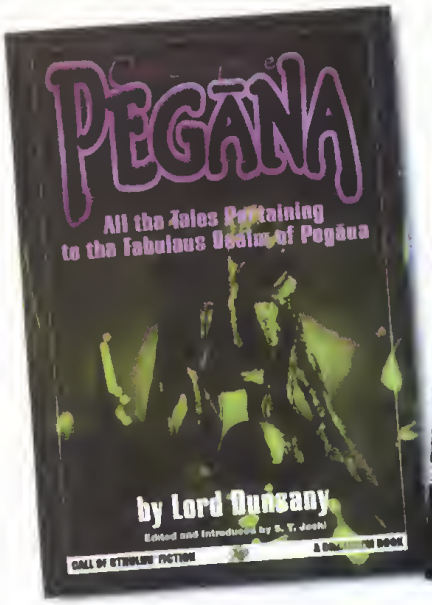
Burnt Offerings, *by Laurell K. Hamilton, Ace; paperback, $6.99.* The return of vampire hunter Anita Blake. A vampire-burning arsonist is torching the creatures of the night. In an unusual twist, Anita Blake is the only one who can save these monsters from sure extinction. Tough-minded and sexy, Blake finds herself sleeping with monsters, something she's always found to mistrust in others. A new spin on sleeping with the enemy replete with supernatural bad guys and mystery/adventure.

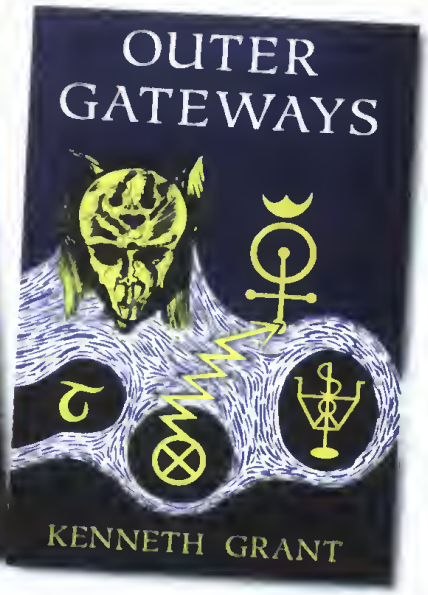
Newton's Cannon, *by J. Gregory Keyes, Del Ray Trade Paperback Original, $14.00.* This new novel of both science and magic is by the author of *The Waterborn* and *The Blackgod*. Called an Umberto Eco-like tale, it opens in the year 1681, where Sir Isaac Newton turns to the ancient art of alchemy. History meets fantasy and the realms of magic overlap with science as one of Newton's experiments unleashes a primal source as elemental as Earth and Water, Fire and Air. And that is just the beginning! Keyes takes the reader to Versailles and Louis XIV, and to the world of a young printer's apprentice named Benjamin Franklin. A dazzling tale revolving around the mysterious device that is Newton's Cannon.

The White Guardian, *by Ronald Anthony Cross, A Tor Book; hardcover, $24.95.* This novel is Book Three of The Eternal Guardians. Author Robert Anton Wilson calls the book a roller-coaster between lewd, pagan LA and haunted, mystic Rome. All the original guardians are dead—all but one. Cross takes his battered characters onward. Only the old Roman gladiator, Corbo, can determine the outcome of the possession of the broken eternal stones. An adventure on a grand and passionate scale. For readers of science fiction, magic, and parody alike, this book has an appeal as vast as the story within.

A Wizard in Midgard, *by Christopher Stasheff, A Tor Book; hardcover, $21.95.* This, the sixth chronicle of Magnus D'Armand, has the rogue wizard in the role of psychic liberator. A witty tale of medieval space colonies and political intrigue. Wizards and galaxies collide in this adventure fantasy of a freedom-fighting champion. If this is your first encounter with the rogue wizard—it will not be your last!

Roar: The Cauldron, *by Sean Kiernan, HarperPrism; paperback, $5.99.* Based on the Universal Television series created by Shaun Cassidy and Ron Koslow. Conor lives! Herein you will find that the youth, Conor, and his brave adventures continue. The Celtic Isles are cursed. The once-fertile land's only hope for renewal lies in a legendary cauldron. The bold Conor must face destiny, desire, and answer every challenge put forth. A must-read for any fans of the Fox TV show, fans of traditional fantasy, and for those entranced with the Emerald Isle.





them all just how to do it.

I only hope nobody takes it seriously!

So long as I've wandered off on this trail I feel it would be remiss of me not to mention the extraordinary works of Kenneth Grant. Mr. Grant is a formidable occultist, the head of several very serious magical organizations, and the author of a series of books on the bolder explorations of unabashed magic packed with absolutely fascinating speculations which, among many, many other intriguing things, pursue the possible connections between occult fiction and the occult as practiced by complicated and highly intelligent people who very sincerely believe in its reality and in its efficacy.

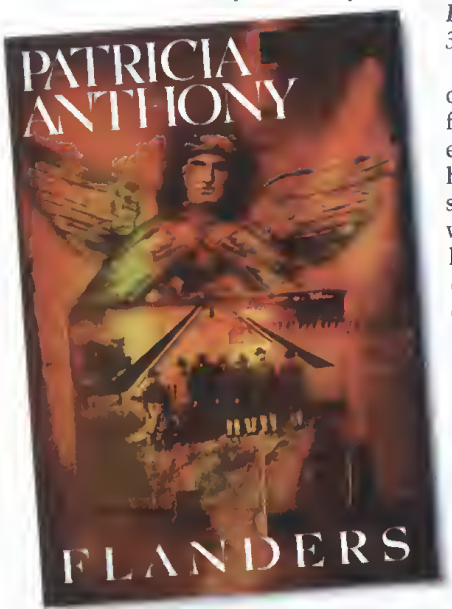
The author who primarily interests him is Howard Phillips Lovecraft. I am personally convinced that the determinedly rationalistic H.P.L. would be flabbergasted to learn of this (I see I've again wandered off into authors' post-mortem survivals!), but Grant's theories by no means exclude the possibility—and now and then even appear to stress the likelihood—that Lovecraft's stories represent completely unconscious but totally genuine connections with the dark entities the man from Providence evoked so very successfully in his wonderful weird tales and denied so convincingly over coffee heavily laced with sugar.

I won't go into them because they are so very lengthy and complex—Grant has produced two trilogies of fascinating books touching on this subject and *Outer Gateways* (Skoob Books Publishing Ltd. London; 264 pages; hardcover; $39.95) is his first book in a third—but I assure you that he does an excellent job of finding and producing truly awesome connections between Lovecraft's fiction and some of humankind's darkest and most horrific sorcerous practices, not only from the painted caves and tunnels of our distant, smoky past, but from the most contemporary, street-wise sources.

Be warned that these books are genuinely upsetting if you are of a speculative and dreamy bent (and what lover of fantasy isn't?), but know that they are also a marvelous source of notions if you write this sort of stuff and that once you've read them, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Arthur Machen will strike you as being even spookier than before.

Tempted?

—Gahan Wilson



***Flanders**, by Patricia Anthony; Ace Books, NY; 368 pp.; hardcover, $23.95.*

Patricia Anthony's *Flanders* inhabits the outskirts of fantasy, a no man's land where fantasy and reality meet. I think we've all experienced moments where the fantastic has intruded on reality: when dreams have seemed so real it was hard to dismiss them, when we thought we saw something we later realized we didn't, when a moment or object seemed imbued with great religious or cosmic significance. *Flanders* tells the story of a man, Travis Lee Stanhope who, in the midst of the suffering and death of World War I, has a series of such experiences. A small-town Texan who grew up with a drunk, abusive father, Travis enlists in the British Army before the States enters the war. He expects adventure and travel,

Continued on page 81

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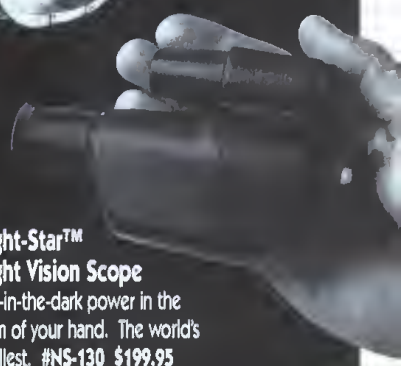

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BY DAN PEREZ

John Carpenter invites us behind the scenes for a look at his Vampires *of the Southwest.*

THERE'S A REASON JOHN CARPENTER IS A BRAND-NAME DIRECTOR (AS THE TITLE OF HIS latest movie, *John Carpenter's Vampires*, indicates). Several reasons, in fact. Carpenter has honed his popular directing style on memorable suspense and horror films such as *Assault on Precinct 13*, *Halloween* (the granddaddy of all slasher-boogeyman films), *Escape From New York*, his remake of *The Thing*, *Big Trouble in Little China* and *They Live*. He's got legions of fans on and off the Internet. He's also had a rocky ride of late, with a series of movies over the past several years that either fizzle (*Prince of Darkness* and *In the Mouth of Madness*) or serve as a parody of his best work (the sequel/remake *Escape From L.A.*). In short, Carpenter could use another hit. However, if the buzz from Internet hipsters who saw his *Vampires* (based on the John Steakley novel *Vampire$*) when it premiered in France back in April is any indication, it looks like Carpenter may be back in fine form.

BELOW: Thomas Ian Griffith plays Valek, master of all vampires, who is in search of the ancient holy cross that allows the undead to walk in daylight. RIGHT: Actor James Woods and director John Carpenter shooting on location.

John Carpenter's Vampires follows a modern-day group of mercenary vampire hunters known as Team Crow. Backed by the Vatican, the team is led by Jack Crow (James Woods), who saw his parents murdered by vampires as a child. Team Crow attacks a nest of vampires in an abandoned farmhouse in New Mexico, destroying all but the master of the vampires, Valek (Thomas Ian Griffith). The powerful Valek, who also happens to be the first vampire in recorded history, takes revenge on Team Crow as they carouse with prostitutes in a New Mexico motel. Jack and his partner Tony Montoya (Daniel Baldwin) are the only survivors, and they decide to use Katrina (Sheryl Lee), a prostitute bitten by Valek, to track him down for a final confrontation. In the meantime, Valek is searching for an ancient cross with the power to allow vampires to go forth during daylight.

"I've always wanted to do a vampire movie," says Carpenter. "This book, *Vampire$*, came along and it really did some things I'd never seen before. It's set in the American Southwest and has certain Western elements to it. I decided this would be the perfect chance to do something different."

Carpenter, a longtime Western fan whose *Assault on Precinct 13* was inspired by the classic Howard Hawks Western *Rio Bravo*, went on to say, "Part of the theme is the dualistic irony of the good guys versus the bad guys. It has all the classic ideas that you've seen in a vampire movie:

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the humans versus the vampires, the hidden sexuality, the idea of drinking blood. All that's at work in this film. But in essence, I've always loved Westerns and one of the reasons I'm doing this movie is that this is the closest I've come to being able to make a Western."

Vampires producer Sandy King (who is also Carpenter's wife) concurs. "It's been said that all of John's movies are Westerns. If you substitute the situations—urban or period or space or, with this case, the Southwest with vampires—and you instead think Howard Hawks *Rio Bravo*, what you see is that John very much follows in his idol's footsteps."

ABOVE: Armed and ready for anything, Jack Crow (James Woods) leads his team of slayers into a nest of vampires hiding out an abandoned New Mexican farmhouse.

"It's about hunting vampires instead of whoever the bad guys of the day were in the classic Western cinema," says James Woods, who plays the lead vampire hunter Jack Crow. "We have set pieces in this movie that are homages to the early works of Howard Hawks and Sam Peckinpah, with the Henry Fondas and John Waynes and William Holdens out braving the ultimate challenge. It's *The Wild Bunch* meets vampires."

"The vampire slayers are gunslingers and the vampires are gunslingers in their own way," says Thomas Ian Griffith, who plays the legendary vampire Valek. "John's taken the Western and added dark overtones we haven't seen before."

James Woods describes Carpenter's approach: "Daniel Baldwin and I come into the town of Santiago on a wide, open street. There's nobody around but there are signs that somebody was there. It's quiet. We take out our guns and look around. I signal him. He signals back to cover me when I go into this little bar. There's about a minute or so where the tension reads that our characters are going to be slaughtered right there. All of a sudden, we realized it was *Rio Bravo*."

King shares her husband's passion for old Westerns and thinks that, as producer, her role is to help Carpenter bring his vision to the big screen. She also likes to make casting decisions that are offbeat or unexpected. "I always tend to go toward ensemble casting," she notes.

"After all," James Woods adds, "these are really dangerous vampires and you like to know that they're hiring real men for the parts—not the sort of 'Hollywood' version of men out hunting vampires."

Oscar-winner Maximilian Schell plays Cardinal Alba, the Vatican agent who enlists the aid of the vampire hunters. "He plays a rather unique character," Carpenter says, "who's conflicted by the situation he has to deal with, between the slayers and some of the guilt the Catholic Church has in having

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ABOVE: The ancient vampire Valek tortures a crucified Jack Crow in John Carpenter's Vampires.

created vampires. He's in a tough spot."

Casting the role of the lead vampire Valek was very important to King. "We wanted someone incredibly handsome that we could decay and would still have charisma," she says. "Thomas moves like a panther. He exudes a sexuality that can overcome the grave. I was sitting in my offices when a shadow filled the doorway, backlit by the Southern California sunshine. One of the things I look for in casting is how other people react, and when Thomas walked through that door, everyone went 'Whoa!' Men and women alike. Women, of course, offered to follow him home. Men said 'God...'" Carpenter adds, "Truly there's no one else who has the power and stature that Thomas has. He is Valek."

Sheryl Lee, who played Laura Palmer in both the cult television hit *Twin Peaks* and the movie *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, plays Katrina, a prostitute who, once bitten by Valek, helps lead the vampire hunters to him. "Katrina gets bitten by a vampire and her story is about her transition from human to vampire," says Carpenter. "It takes about four or five days until the virus or whatever it is gets into your system and takes over. In the meantime, she's having a relationship with Daniel Baldwin's character and they're beginning to fall for each other. It's an interesting situation. In essence, besides this being a vampire picture, you have a love triangle with all of these main characters battling over a woman who is turning into a vampire. She's being controlled by the master, but she's with our slayers who are using her to track him down. It's a story with a lot of tension."

For *John Carpenter's Vampires* Lee got into her role by "working with hunger: not eating all day until I was so hungry I couldn't stand it, then going past it and eating a medium-rare steak, seeing it pink and opening all those primal, instinctual places. It's not just 'I'm hungry,' it's '*I have to have that piece of meat!*' This is coming from someone who was a vegetarian for four or five years." She also steeped herself in vampire literature. "I've got all the vampire books. My favorite one is *Zen and the Art of Slaying Vampires*. At first I thought I shouldn't read it because it's about a vampire slayer, but the vampire slayer is actually a vampire,

MORE OFFBEAT VAMPIRES

Vampires have endured as one of the most popular (if not *the* most popular) movie monsters for decades. Many revisionist takes on vampires have been done, such as Joel Shumacher's stylish 1987 *The Lost Boys*, in which vampires are reinterpreted *a'la* J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. If you're looking for some other offbeat vampire fare, check out some of the following movies.

Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (1922, German) This "symphony of horror" is, of course, F.W. Murnau's classic silent vampire tale, inspired by Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. Tall, gangly Max Shreck plays Count Orlok, the sinister vampire who was more fearsome and animal-like than Bela Lugosi's seductive *Dracula*, which came out nine years later. The first vampire movie still has power to enthrall, and even if some of its images are familiar to today's modern audiences, it's rarely seen.

The Fearless Vampire Killers or *Pardon Me, But Your Teeth Are In My Neck* is Roman Polanski's amusing 1967 vampire spoof. It's sexy (Polanski's doomed wife Sharon Tate plays a country maid in vampiric peril—photo, right) and atmospheric, with Polanski playing a bumbling, fearful assistant to vampire hunter Professor Abronsius (Jack MacGowran). The scene where Abronsius deploys a crucifix, only to find out he's battling a Jewish vampire, is a classic rib-tickler.

1987 was a pretty good year for vampire movies. In addition to *The Lost Boys*, we got *Near Dark*, Kathryn Bigelow's raw-edged look at a "family" of vampires who travel through the rural Southwest in cars and vans shielded against the sunlight. Bigelow (*Strange Days*) was married to James Cameron at the time, and *Aliens* cast members Lance Henrikson, Jenette Goldstein and Bill Paxton feature prominently in the film. *Lost Boys* was a big hit that year, and *Near Dark* remains undeservedly underseen.

The idea of vampires as a science fictional construct has been explored in movies like the hugely disappointing (but still mildly amusing) *Lifeforce*, but for a creepy, low-budget treat, try *Queen of Blood*, also known as *Planet of Blood*. This 1966 Roger Corman/AIP thriller features Basil Rathbone and Dennis Hopper in the story of an Earth spaceship which goes to Mars, where an alien spacecraft has crashlanded (in fact, Ridley Scott's *Alien* appears at least partially inspired by this movie). The crew find a sole female survivor, played with enigmatic menace by Florence Marly. Before long, she starts hypnotizing and draining crewmembers of their blood. So what do these guys do? Take her back to Earth, of course. The hypnosis scenes are genuinely eerie.

George Romero is best-known for his *Night of the Living Dead* zombie trilogy, but he also made a very effective, low-key vampire movie, 1977's *Martin*. John Ampla plays the title role as a young man who may or may not be a vampire. He definitely has a fetish for drinking blood, and likes to drug his victims and drain their blood with syringes and razor blades. He moves in with his elderly cousin (Lincoln Maazel), who calls him "Nosferatu" and eventually becomes a minor radio celebrity, all the while attacking women for their blood. The movie, shot in a low-budget, *cinema verité* style, is thought-provoking and the disturbing ending will stay with you for some time.

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which is why he's such a good slayer. It's a spiritual journey about facing the vampire within us. When we slay the vampire, we're also slaying the vampire within us. It's spiritual in the sense that we're not just light, but light and dark. To deny the dark does nothing but give it more power. To embrace it and acknowledge it and see its purpose is what makes you whole.

"What a vampire represents is our most primal instincts," she continues. "All of that stuff we're not allowed to do, all the stuff that's bad and wrong. But that's what it is. It's survival, blood, the life force, the hunger, the desire, the passion, the need. It's immortality. That's why vampires are so romantic—the mystique, the myth—because there's so much seduction involved in vampirism."

Carpenter, in typical form, puts it a bit more bluntly: "My feeling about vampire movies is that if you don't have sex, it's not a vampire movie." In fact, there was much discussion of the link between sex and vampirism on the set. "From the dawn of mythology, evil has always been alluring," says King. "Vampires have a heavy sexual connotation. They came out of Victorian times. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was entirely about repressed sexuality, though he was not so repressed when he wrote it."

Woods is a little more pragmatic in his take. "Our vampires are not seductive. They're just ornery, down-home, blood-drinking mothers. We're out to get them and kill them and that's it. We're basically going after the 'alien pod.' They're bad people who need to have wooden stakes driven through their hearts and get pulled out into the sunlight and blown up."

Putting vampires in a Western setting made for some interesting cultural collisions, according to King. "Southwest gothic is the look of the film. The flavor of the vampires comes from the European Middle Ages around the time of the Crusades. If you look at the architecture of the Southwest, it harkens back to the very old architecture in Italy. You can see the influence of Italy and Spain in the colonization of this area through the gates, the arches, the block houses. It looks like Tuscany. It made it more fun to connect here to the Southwest because you can believe that ancient monks brought a cross here and hid it. You believe the connection to Europe and buy that vampires from the old country found their way here to search through these places."

"We have enormous thunderclouds that rise above gorgeous mesas with huge rattlesnakes going across the road," says Woods of the locations. "It's very beautiful and serene but, in keeping with the theme of our movie, rather forbidding in ways you don't expect. The whole area around Santa Fe has a haunted beauty about it, which is, when you think about it, the plight of the vampire." ❧

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BY TERRI WINDLING

One is for Sorrow, Two is for Joy: The Magical Lore of Birds.

ON A COOL SPRING NIGHT ON TRIBAL RESERVATION LANDS IN SOUTHERN ARIZONA, I sit among the men, women, and children surrounding a cottonwood fire at the center of a large tipi. A drum is passed from hand to hand. A staff. A rattle. Songs are sung. We are keeping vigil through the night, struggling against the pull of sleep. Long hours pass, and suddenly I find that I am wide awake—caught up in songs and the fast, insistent pulse of the drum, the land's heartbeat. Midnight passes, a sign is given, and people take hold of feathers and fans. The fans are made of groups of feathers stitched together on leather hand-grips decorated with bright bead work in the colors of the Four Directions (white, black, yellow, and red). Feathers carry the powerful "medicine" of the beautiful birds from which they come: eagle and hawk (usually the most prized) and many other "winged relatives." Now cedar is thrown on coals of the fire, filling the night with a pungent scent; feathers stir the air, spreading blessings around the circle and carrying prayers aloft.

The Dark of the Moon: *As this Celtic queen (by English artist Brian Froud) crosses into the Faery realm, a raven and a hawk hover close by to guide the way.*

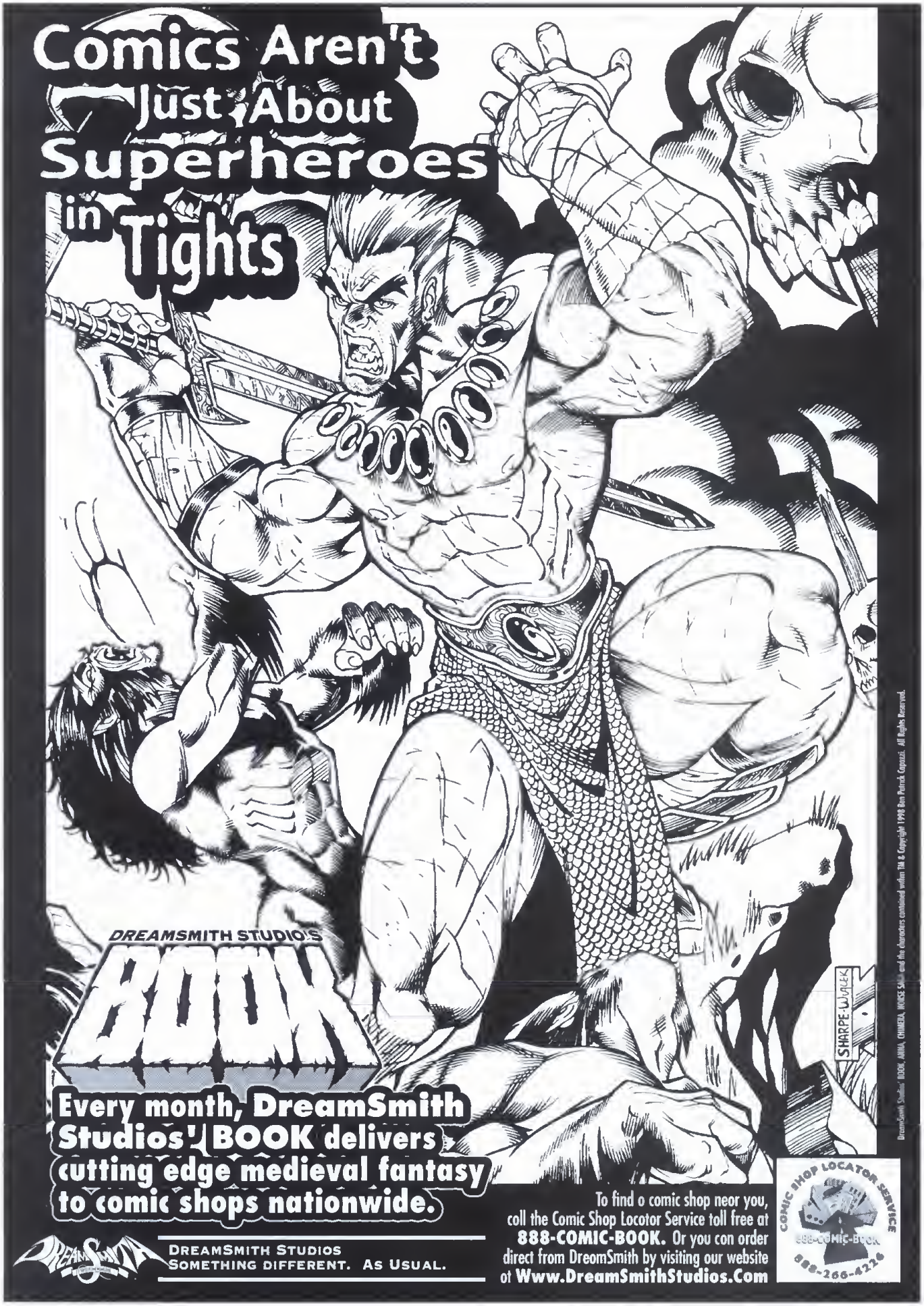
In the morning, when the ceremony is done, the feathers are carefully packed away, wrapped in red cloth and placed in long, wooden boxes alongside rattles, cedar, tobacco, and bundles of sage. A convivial feast typically follows ceremonial gatherings. As I sit with fry bread dripping with honey and chili so hot it burns my tongue, an O'Odom man squats down beside me, cowboy hat angled over his brow. "So you're off to England again?" he says. "Bring some feathers with you when you come back. They got birds over there in En-ga-land?" he adds, grinning, teasing me.

"Sure," I say. "Hawks. Eagles. Their feathers were used for ceremonies and prayers, a long, long time ago. Eagles and hawks were sacred to the Celts—the same as here."

My friend is surprised, for like many Native Americans (and many Euro-Americans too), he was unaware that European peoples once practiced religions native to their soil...and that, indeed, some people still quietly follow the "old ways" today.

I remember this exchange some weeks later when I am back in England once again, standing in the Devon studio of sculptor Wendy Froud. Wendy works with imagery drawn from Celtic and other mythologies, ranging from whimsical faery figures to Green Men and Horned Women who might have stepped directly from the pages of a Robert Holdstock book (and have, in fact, inspired Rob's imagery on more than one occasion). The studio is crowded with work: masks patterned from oak and ivy leaves; a mystical "Lord and Lady of the Wood"; a brooding raven-haired "Fallen Angel," black bird wings stretched behind him. A sphinx crouches on a pile of books, soft owl wings tucked at her side. Faeries borrow the wings of birds, and lie sleeping curled within birds' nests. Feathers from buzzards, owls, and ravens sit among the tool of the sculptor's trade, waiting to have their "medicine" woven into art born of ancient stories.

In the earliest art of humankind, such as the Paleolithic cave paintings of Lascaux, we find marvelous depictions of birds—as well as human figures with the heads or wings of birds, shamanic in nature. Cloaks of feathers were traditionally worn by shamans not only in the Americas but in Africa, Siberia, and among the early tribes of Europe. The Tuatha De Danaan, the faery race of old Ireland, sometimes appeared as birds, their necks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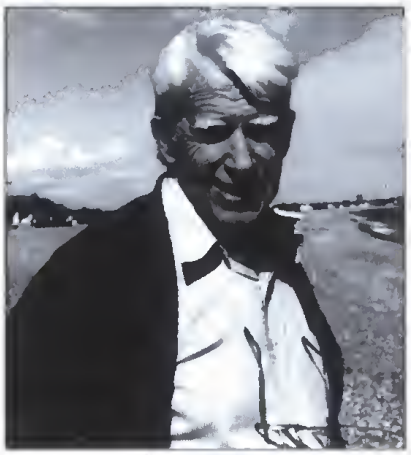

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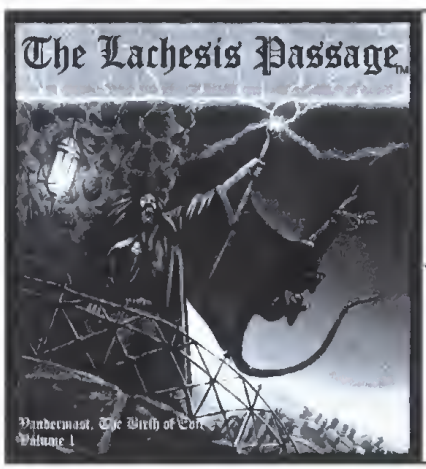

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adorned with gold and silver chains; alternately, they also took human shape wearing magical cloaks of feathers. The Celtic islands of immortality had orchards thick with birds and bees, where beautiful faery women lived in houses thatched with bright bird feathers. Birds are messengers of the gods in myth cycles told all over the world: They carry blessings down to humankind and prayers up to the heavens. They lead wizards to the Spirit World and dead souls to the Realm Beyond; they follow heroes on quests, uncover secrets, give warning and shrewd council. The movements, cries, and migratory patterns of birds were studied as oracles. In Celtic lands, ravens were domesticated as divinatory birds, although eagles, geese, and the humble wren also had prophetic powers. In Norse myth, the two ravens of Odin flew throughout the world each dawn, then perched on the raven-god's shoulder to whisper news into his ears. A dove with the power of human speech sat in branches of the sacred oak grove at Zeus's oracle at Dodona; a woodpecker was the oracular bird in groves sacred to Mars.

According to various Siberian tribes, the eagle was the very first shaman, sent to humankind by the gods to heal sickness and suffering. Frustrated that human beings could not understand its speech or ways, the bird mated with a human woman, and she soon gave birth to a child from whom all shamans are now descended. In a mystic cloak of bird feathers, the shaman chants, drums and prays him- or herself into a trance. The soul takes flight, soaring into the spirit world beyond our everyday perception. (Great care must be taken in this exercise, lest the wing-borne soul forget its way back home.) Likewise, the shamans of Finland call upon their eagle ancestors to lead them into the spirit realms and bring them safely back again. Shamans, like eagles, are blessed (or cursed) with the ability to cross between the human world and the realm of the gods, the lands of the living and the lands of the dead. Despite the healing powers this gives them (the "medicine" of their bird ancestry), men and women in shamanic roles were often seen as frightening figures, half-mad by any ordinary measure, poised between coexistent worlds, fully present in none.

The Buriats of Siberia traced their lineage back to an eagle and a swan, honoring the ancestral swan-mother with migration ceremonies each autumn and spring. To harm a swan, or even mishandle swan feathers, could cause illness or death; likewise, to harm a woman could bring the wrath of the swans upon men. A swan-maiden was the mother of Cuchulain, hero of Ireland's Ulster cycle, and thus the warrior had a *geas* (taboo) against killing these sacred birds. Swan-maidens (as well as goose- and magpie-maidens) are found in folk stories all across Europe. In a typical tale, a man spies upon a group of women bathing in a lake. When he is discovered, the women rise from the water,

wrapping themselves in feather cloaks. Transforming into pure white swans, they vanish into the sky. The man snatches up one cloak, trapping a swan-maiden in human form. He marries her and she bears him sons—but she pines away for her own true shape. Eventually she finds the hidden cloak, immediately puts it on, transforms, and leaves—with nary a pang of regret for those left behind. A lovely Japanese variant (retold by Grace James in *Green Willow and Other Japanese Fairy Tales*) concerns the elusive "Strange People" by the waters of Mio Strand. A fisherman returns to shore at night and finds a feather robe hanging from a pine branch. "Ah, the warm, sweet, fairy thing!" he says. "I'll take it home for a treasure." A maiden of the Strange People, clad only in her long black hair, runs after him—for without her robe she cannot fly home again. The fisherman bargains with her shrewdly, and she agrees to dance for him. Thus he is witness to the mystic dance that makes the Moon turn through the sky. When it is done, she spreads rainbow-colored wings and disappears into the dawn, leaving a single gray dove's feather behind her on the strand.

In "The Children of Lir," one of the Three Great Sorrows of Irish mythology, the four children of the lord of the sea are transformed into wild swans by the magic of a jealous stepmother. Neither Lir himself nor all the great magicians of the Tuatha De Danann can mitigate the power of the curse, and the four are condemned to spend three hundred years on Lake Derryvaragh, three hundred years on the Mull of Cantyre, and a final three hundred years off the stormy coast of Mayo. During this time, the Children of Lir retain the use of human speech, and the swans are famed throughout the land for the beauty of their song. The curse is ended when a princess of the South is wed to Lairgren, king of Connacht in the North. The swan-shapes fall away at last, but now they resume their human shapes as four withered and ancient souls. They soon die, and are buried together in a single grave by the edge of the sea. For many centuries, Irishmen would not harm a swan because of this sad story—and country folk still say that a dying swan sings a song of eerie beauty, recalling the music of the Children of Lir...and echoing the ancient Greek belief that a swan sings sweetly once in a lifetime (i.e.: a "swan song"), in the moments before it dies. (I recommend *The Children of Lir*, a picture book by Sheila MacGill-Calahan, gorgeously illustrated by the Russian painter Gennardy Spirin, based on this Irish legend.)

"The Children of Lir" has strong thematic links to "The Six Swans," a famous Grimm's fairy tale, as well as its many variants (such as the Grimm's tale "The Seven Crows"). In the German story, the sons of a king are turned into swans by a jealous stepmother; their sister wanders over the land, searching for a way to help them. To break the curse, she learns that she must weave six shirts out

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of star-flowers; she must accomplish this impossible task within six years; and until the job is done she is not allowed to laugh or speak. (In other versions, the coats must be made of nettles, which sting and bloody her hands. The swans, turning back to men between the hours of dusk and dawn, can not dissuade their young sister from this grim and painful task.) A woodland king finds the silent girl, falls in love, and marries her. But she will not speak, and creeps from the castle by night to seek more flowers. The king's own wicked stepmother conspires to make the silent young bride appear to be a murderess. On the day the girl is condemned to burn to death, the six swan-brothers appear overhead. She throws the shirts upon them, ends the curse, and proves her innocence. But in her haste, one shirt has been left tragically incomplete, and the youngest brother must live henceforth with one arm and one swan's wing. (For two entertaining accounts of what may have happened to the youngest brother next, see Nicholas Stuart Gray's novel *The Seventh Son* and Ursula Synge's *Swan's Wing*.)

Crows and ravens are also birds omnipresent in myth and folklore. The crow, commonly portrayed as a trickster or thief, was considered an ominous portent—and yet crows were also sacred to Apollo in Graeco-Roman myth; to Varuna, guardian of the sacred order in Vedic lore; and to Amaterasu Omikami, the sun-goddess of old Japan. The ancestral spirits of the Maratha in India resided in crows; in Egypt a pair of crows symbolized conjugal felicity. In the Aboriginal lore of Australia and the myths of many North American tribes, Raven appears as a dual-natured Trickster and Creator God, credited with bringing fire, light, sexuality, song, dance, and life itself to humankind. In Celtic lore, the raven belonged to Morrigan, the Irish war goddess—as well as to Bran the Blessed in the great Welsh epic, The Mabinogion. Tradition has it that Bran's severed head is buried under the Tower of London. A ceremonial Raven Master still keeps watch over the birds of the Tower; an old custom says that if Bran's birds ever leave the Tower, the kingdom will fall. A woman I know in a village near mine has been given legal permission to keep a crippled raven as a household companion; the enormous bird cuts a dashing figure in her witchy cottage in the Devon countryside. The raven's license includes a clause that the bird will be made available to the Tower's Raven Master should it ever be needed. The old custom may be mere superstition, but the British Government is taking no chances! (For a captivating look at ravens and crows, weaving indigenous North American and Celtic creation myths together, see Charles de Lint's new "Newford" novel, *Somewhere to be Flying*.)

Geese were holy, protected birds in many ancient societies. In Egypt, the great Nile Goose created the world by laying the cosmic egg from which the Sun was hatched. The goose was sacred to Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Hera, Queen of Heaven. In India, the goose—a solar symbol—drew the chariot of Vishnu; the wild goose, a vehicle of Brahma, represented the creative principle, learning and eloquence. In Siberia, the Goddess Toman shook feathers from her sleeve each spring. They turned into geese, carefully tended and observed by Siberian shamans. Freyja, the goddess of northern Europe who travels the land in a chariot drawn by cats, is sometimes pictured with only one human foot and the other of a goose or swan—an image with shamanic significance in various traditions. Berchta, the fierce German goddess (or witch) associated with the Wild Hunt, is also pictured with a single goose foot as she rides upon the backs of storms. Caesar tells us that geese were sacred in Britain, and thus taboo as food—a custom still extant in certain Gaelic areas today. Goose-girls, talking geese, and the goose that lays golden eggs are all standard ingredients in the folk tales ("Mother Goose" tales) of Europe. The term "silly as a goose" is recent; Ovid called them "wiser than the dog."

The owl is a bird credited with more malevolence than any other, even though its reputation for wisdom goes back to our earliest myths. In Greece, the owl (sacred to both Athena and Demeter) was revered as a prescient creature—yet also feared, for its call or sudden appearance could foretell a death.

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Troll-witch *(by Brian Froud): The owl is a bird often believed to be the familiar of witches.*

Lilith, Adam's wife before Eve (banished for her lack of submissiveness) was associated with owls and depicted with wings or taloned feet. In the Middle East, evil spirits took the shape of owls to steal children away—while in Siberia, tamed owls were kept in the house as protectors of children. In Africa, sorcerers in the shape of owls caused mischief in the night. Among the Ainu of Japan, the owl foretold misfortune—except for the Eagle Owl, revered as a mediator between humans and the gods. In North America, the symbolism of the owl varied among indigenous tribes. The Pueblo peoples considered them harmful; to the Navajo they were restless ghosts of the dead and to be avoided. The Pawnee and Menominee, on the other hand, found owls could be helpful, protective spirits, and Tohono O'Odom medicine singers used their feathers in healing ceremonies. When we turn to British folklore, the cry of an owl is considered an ill omen, prophesying death, illness, and the loss of a woman's honor. To the old Pictish and Celtic tribes, the owl was considered a sacred bird—yet also one to be feared for its solitary, predatory night habits. In the Fourth Branch of The Mabinogion, the magician Gwydion takes revenge upon Blodeuwedd (the girl he made out of flowers, who married and then betrayed his son) by turning her into an owl: a bird that others must shun. (I highly recommend two novels inspired by this fascinating myth: *Owl Service* by Alan Garner and *The Island of the Mighty* by Evangeline Walton.)

The crane is a bird associated with death in Celtic traditions. It was one of the shapes assumed by the King of Annwn, the underworld. Cranes were portents of treachery, war, evil deeds, and evil women...yet the bird enjoyed a better reputation in other lands. It was sacred to Apollo—a messenger and an honored herald of the spring.

In Celtic lore, the magpie was a bird associated with faery revels; with the spread of Christianity, however, this changed to a connection with witches and devils. In Scandinavia, magpies were said to be sorcerers flying to unholy gatherings, and yet the nesting magpie was once considered a sign of luck in those countries. In old Norse myth, Skadi (the daughter of a giant) was priestess of the magpie clan; the black and white markings of the bird represented sexual union, as well as male and female energies kept in perfect balance. In China the magpie was the Bird of Joy, and two magpies symbolized marital bliss; in Rome, magpies were sacred to Bacchus and a symbol of sensual pleasure. In England, the sighting of magpies is still considered an omen in this common folk rhyme: "One for sorrow, two for joy; three for a girl, and four for a boy. Five for silver, six for gold, and seven for a secret that's never been told."

The wren is another "faery bird": a portent of faery encounters, and sometimes a faery in disguise. The wren was sacred to Celtic druids and the Welsh poet-magician Taliesin—thus it was considered unlucky to kill the wren at any time of year except during the ceremonial "Hunting of the Wren," around the winter solstice. "Wren Boys" dressed in rag-tag costumes, carrying pipes, pots, pans, and drums, walk in procession behind a wren (killed and mounted upon a pole dressed with oak leaves and mistletoe). In some areas, Wren Boys appeared on Michaelmas, twelfth Night, or St. Stephen's Day carrying a live wren from cottage to cottage (in a small "Wren House" decorated with ribbons), collecting tributes of coins and mugs of beer wherever they stopped. The wren was known as the king of the birds according to one old story: All the birds held a parliament and decided that whoever could fly the highest and fastest would be crowned king. The eagle easily outdistanced the others, but the clever wren hid under his wing until the eagle faltered—then the wren jumped out and flew even higher.

The dove was a bird associated with the Mother Goddesses of many traditions—symbolizing light, healing powers, and the transition from one state of existence to the next. The dove was sacred to Astarte, Ishtar, Freyja, Brighid, and Aphrodite. The bird also represented the external soul, separate from the life of the body—and thus magicians hid their souls or hearts in the shape of doves. Doves give guidance in fairy tales, where (in contrast with their usual gentle image) they

show a marked penchant for bloody retribution. White doves light upon the tree Cinderella has planted upon her mother's grave, transforming rags to riches so she can go to the prince's ball. These are the birds that warn the prince of "blood in the shoe!" when the stepsisters try to fit into the delicate slipper by hacking off their heels and toes. The birds eventually blind the treacherous sisters, pecking out their eyes. The white dove of "The Famous Flower of Serving Men" is a soul in limbo: a knight cruelly murdered by his mother-in-law. He flies through the forest shedding blood-red tears and telling his story. The woman is eventually burned. Murdered children in several fairy tales reappear as snow-white doves, hovering around the family home until vengeance is finally served. The mysterious song of the nightingale has also inspired several classic tales; most famously: "The Nightingale" by Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen and the tragic story of "The Nightingale and the Rose" by England's Oscar Wilde. (I recommend Kara Dalkey's lyrical novel *The Nightingale*, based on the former.)

The stork is another Goddess bird—sacred to Hera and nursing mothers, which may be why it appears in folklore carrying newborn babies to earth. The lark, the linnet, the robin, the loon…they've all engendered tales of their own, winging their way between heaven and earth. In the short space of this column we can only begin to explore the subject of birds in ancient mythic tales and modern mythic arts. We've skipped right passed the imaginary birds (such as the phoenix) and hybrid bird-creatures (harpies, gryphons, etc.). We've missed the bird-people (Tengu) of Japan and the bird cults of South America …we've not swallowed the tongues of hawks to speak with birds in their own language. So let me send you to some good books where you'll encounter these things yourselves: I recommend: *The Folklore of Birds: An Inquiry into the Origins of Some Magico-Religious Traditions* by Edward A. Armstrong and *Birds in Legend, Fable and Folklore* by E. Ingersoll (originally published in 1958 and 1923 respectively, you'll find these through inter-library loans or antiquarian bookshops); *Augeries and Omens: The Magical Lore of Birds* by Yvonne Aburrow (marred by an overly "New Age" bent yet full of fascinating bird lore, this book is available from Capall Bann Publishing, Freshfields, Chievely, Bershire RG16 8TF, England); Ovid's *Metamorphoses; Symbolic and Mythological Animals* by J.C. Cooper; *Animal Spirits* by Nicholas J. Saunders; *Celtic Heritage* by Alwyn and Brinley Rees; *Mabon and the Mysteries of Britain* by Caitlin Matthews; *Power of Raven, Wisdom of Serpent: Celtic Women's Spirituality* by Noragh Jones; *Earth, Air, Fire and Water: Pre-Christian Elements in British Songs, Rhymes and Ballads* by R. Skelton and M. Blackwood; *A Dictionary of Symbols* and *A Dictionary of Sacred Myth* by Tom Chetwynd; *Shamanism* by Mircea Eliade, and

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All gardens look lovely—so lovely, we don't like to think about what lies just beneath the surface of the earth—and the heavens.

ARMAGEDDON'S Favorite Rose

BY CHRISTOPHER MOWBRAY
Illustration by Patrick Arrasmith

MR. FLOWERS WAS IN HIS GARDEN WHEN THE Preacher came to call. It was early afternoon, and Mr. Flowers had been busy with the compost.

He was not pleased to see the Preacher, but everyone was welcome here, even long-winded Pentecostals.

"It's a fine day for it," the Preacher began. He was a fastidious man, always neatly dressed in his medium-priced, light blue suit. Blue was his color. The clear, sweet blue of a cloudless sky. Hallelujah blue, as he liked to call it. Blue as the twinkle in God's eye.

"It's always a good day for something," Mr. Flowers replied. He put down the shovel he had been using to rearrange a huge pile of steaming compost, and met the Preacher's gaze.

The Preacher lost himself for a while in the old man's eyes. They were so dark and still, he kept waiting for the stars to come out. It seemed like forever before he could look away.

"Every day is a fine day, if you are busy with the work of the Lord," he managed at last.

"Well, I've been busy with the work of table scraps and chicken shit, and I'm about ready for a drink." He started to walk away, then looked back over his shoulder and said, "You could do with a drink as well, I suppose," and walked on. The Preacher hurried to catch up.

HE SAT ON THE ROUGH-LOOKING BENCH OUTSIDE MR. Flowers' house, while his host went inside to fetch the refreshments. The house was small, old, and made of discolored, white brick.

The Preacher had to admit, it was peaceful here. He had never been one for the great outdoors, preferring the neatly mowed lawns of the suburbs, which in his opinion revealed more of God's plan for mankind than any mountain brook or forest ever could.

Mr. Flowers returned, carrying a tray that he set down on the stump he used as a table. On the tray were two glass mugs filled with dark, frothy beer.

"It's a bit early in the day for me," the Preacher said, a slight frown creasing his face. In truth, he was not much of a drinker, and never partook of beer or spirits. Wine was his drink of choice. The Lord himself was a wine drinker. And of course, Saint Paul had admonished Timothy to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach. Beer had always seemed to him to be a lesser drink—not sinful exactly—but unworthy somehow for a man of the cloth.

Mr. Flowers would hear no excuses, "Beer's the thing after a hard day's work," he said. He took a long draft, then continued, "It is also an excellent beverage for conversation. Of course, if you really want a drink of water, there's a tap on the way out."

The Preacher had no choice—he could not afford to lose this opportunity—he raised the mug to his lips, and downed a mouthful. It was cold, dark, and bitter. Full of the green and brown flavors of the earth. And, in spite of everything he believed in, it was good.

They drank in silence for a while, and the Preacher looked for any signs of what he suspected, in the old man's face and mannerisms.

Mr. Flowers was thin; all skin and sinew. The kind of old man it was hard to put an age to. But everyone the Preacher had spoken to agreed he had been here almost forever. The oldest resident of the street. Even old Mrs. Piper—who was over the age of 80—remembered Mr. Flowers as an old man. An old man with a garden.

What was it you wanted to see me about anyway?" Mr. Flowers asked, cocking a craggy eyebrow.

The Preacher had been afraid of this. He had wanted to get to know the old man first: build up a bit of trust before getting down to business. He would just have to trust in the Lord, and his own, silver-tongued powers of persuasion.

"I was hoping I might have a look at your rose?"

"You must have passed the bushes on the way in. How could you have missed them?"

"That's not the rose I mean," said the Preacher, trying to fill his voice with the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. His mother always said he had a blessed voice.

"What do you mean, special rose?" Mr. Flowers queried, unimpressed by the Preacher's vocal stylings.

THE CONVERSATION WENT ON LIKE this for quite some time. The Preacher suspected that Mr. Flowers knew exactly what he was asking about. This was no way to treat a man of the cloth.

Then the Preacher lost his temper. "I know who you are, the Lord has revealed it to me!" His voice had risen in pitch, taking on the unpleasant nasal quality of a spoiled child.

"Don't you dare to deny my holy vision. I know you are the Angel that the Lord sent to guard the garden and the tree of eternal life!" The Preacher's face was ecstatic. "I abdure thee, show me the sacred fruit."

The Preacher had expected laughter, or at least some sort of denial. What he got was silence. A silence so deep and distant that the Preacher felt lost and afraid.

"Why should I show you anything?" Mr. Flowers' anger was obvious, although his voice remained unchanged.

"You must show me because I am a holy man, and I serve the truth."

"Truth you say?" Mr. Flowers looked doubtful. "Do you think you are ready for the burden of truth?"

"I live for the truth," said the Preacher, "show me your truth now!"

"If that is what you really want," said the old man, with a weary sigh. "Follow me."

He started down a path at such a fast pace that the Preacher had to jog to keep up.

IT SEEMED TO TAKE HOURS, BUT FINALLY they arrived at the greenhouse. Only it wasn't green, and the humidity inside clouded the dirty windows, hiding whatever was inside from view.

The smell of rotting earth was overpowering. So strong that the Preacher thought he was going to be sick.

"The truth is in there though you may not like it much," said Mr. Flowers, as he opened the creaking door and ducked inside. The Preacher followed him into the humid darkness. He didn't like it here, but that was not going to stop him. He closed his eyes and prayed. The Lord would show him the way.

And when he opened his eyes—praise the Lord!—he could see. There was Mr. Flowers, standing by a pink glow.

It was the rose.

Long stemmed and perfect, the rose filled the gloom with light. More than light, it was the presence of something so alive that the darkness could not touch it.

"I was right," whispered the Preacher. He had believed before: Now his faith was vindicated.

"Were you indeed?" Mr. Flowers inquired. "Why don't you tell me exactly what you think you know." There was no denying his tone of voice.

"You are the Angel with the flaming sword, sent by God Almighty to guard Eden after the fall, lest the sinners find their way back into Paradise. Then, with the coming of the flood, the last fruit of the tree of life was given into your hands. Ever since then, you have been God's gardener. Preserving the one remaining piece of earthly perfection."

Mr. Flowers did laugh then. Laughter that was painful for the Preacher to hear. Honest hilarity, blended with deep cynicism. This was the laugh of someone who knew, and even the Preacher's unshakable faith could not deny it. The laughter peeled on forever, as if this were a cathedral, and not some run-down garden shed.

There was silence. It enveloped the Preacher, as if the world had grown bored with him, and turned its attention to more interesting things.

"You are wrong." With those quiet, certain words, the world came rushing back. But was it the same world as before? The Preacher wanted to ask, but he was afraid.

What if this was a world of total truth and utter reality? Where would that leave him? He was a man of faith, not knowledge. He needed to believe, and have others believe in him. Mr. Flowers' words, and the light from the rose, left him no room for belief. His faith had required doubt.

The uncertainties of life allowed him to believe in God, and believe that he was something more than a school dropout. That he was glory bound. Chosen.

THE ROSE FILLED HIS MIND. THE ROSE. HE watched beads of moisture forming on its petals. Perfect tears, that he longed to cry.

Mr. Flowers put a surprisingly gentle hand on the Preacher's shoulder. They stood, seeing the Rose together.

"You see," said Mr. Flowers, "this is not what remains of the first garden. It is the beginning of the new one. The garden that is to come."

He reached over, plucked a petal from the Rose, offered it to the Preacher. "If you want your faith again, take it and eat. Or come and learn wisdom for yourself."

The Preacher took the petal, expecting the sweetest taste that he had ever known.

It was just a petal. Rubbery, and slightly damp.

He was about to tell Mr. Flowers, when something hit him from behind. Something that tore at him. Turning his world to red. Then he faded away.

PARADISE WAS A WONDER. THE AIR was clean, and sweeter than milk and honey. He walked through the garden until he found them. They were in a glade, attended by the most beautiful animals he had ever seen. She was on her hands and knees. He was on top, thrusting from behind. Their faces were filled with bliss, and the most innocent joy. Their bodies trembling with the tenderness of their love.

He strode forward. "Stop that at once. It's disgusting!" He pulled them apart, then chased the animals away. Behavior like this was forbidden in his garden.

After all, he was still the Preacher.

BACK IN THE OTHER GARDEN, MR. FLOWERS had just finished his meal. He glided back to the tree; the path beneath his belly was smooth and warm in the late afternoon sun. When he reached the tree, he climbed up and looped his coils around its trunk.

His eyes were dim, but he could still see her inside. "Not long now, great lady." When he closed his eyes, he could still see the gardens of long ago, each with its Lady and Serpent, granting their gifts of wisdom to a newly born world. Then he saw, again, the lost garden, where wisdom had died at the hands of blind faith.

He thought of the future he was guarding, then he thought of tomorrow: and all the compost he had to shovel. ❧

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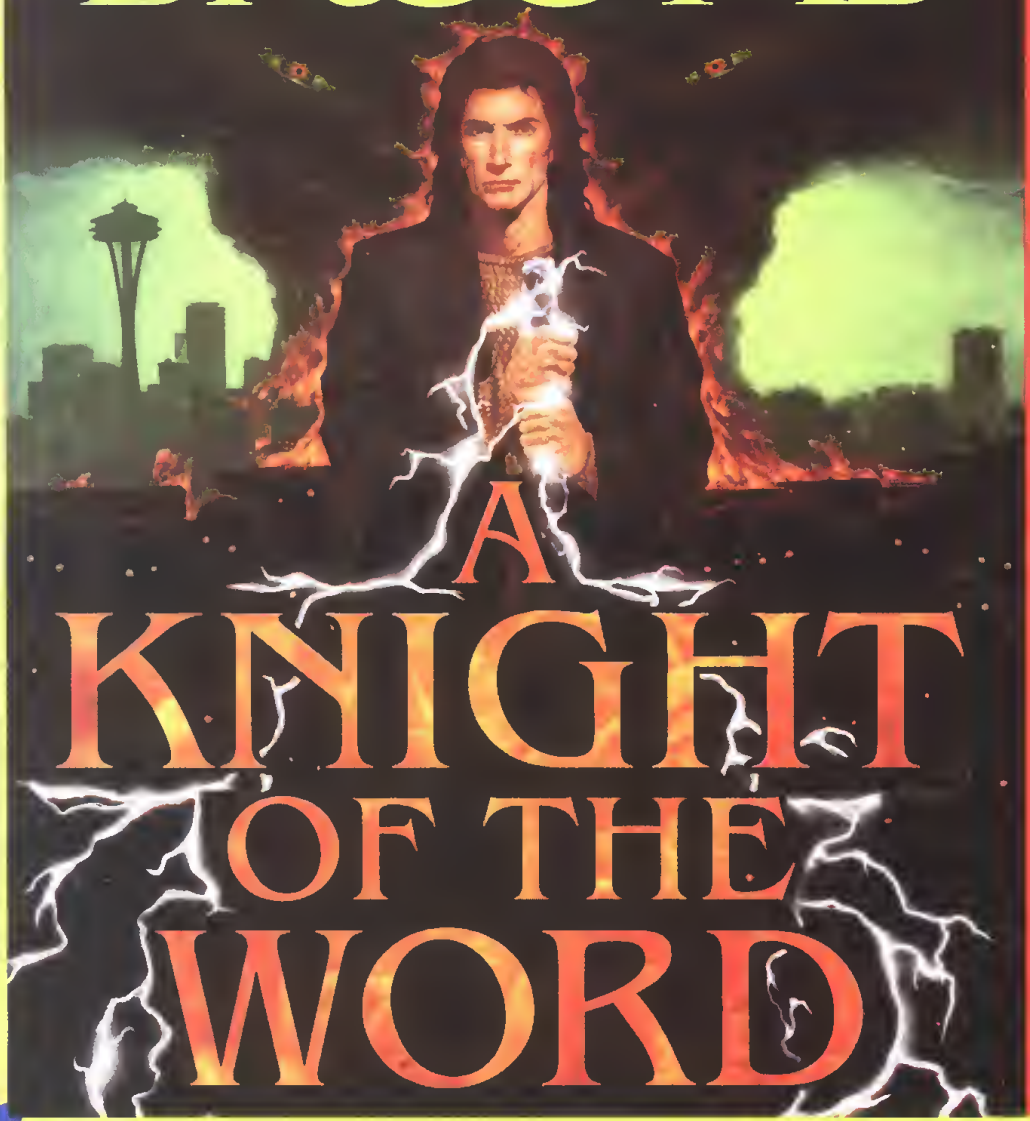

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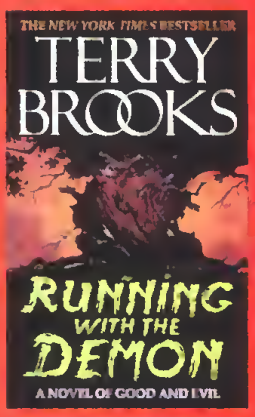

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Antique Land

I Met a Traveler from an

HE TURNED HIS FACE AWAY as the sky strobed red and white. Groggy, disoriented, he awoke without knowing who he was. He was only another traveler on a train, one of many. He glanced at the others in their dark suits and overcoats. With a sigh he slumped against the wall, his head pressed against the cold window pane. He stared at his hands limp in his lap, glowing in the steady pulse of colored lighting from the sky. He sat on cracked green vinyl seats. Graffiti marked the back of the seat in front of him. The train rocked with the clack-lak-lak-clack-lak-lak of the wheels. Someone coughed. He lolled his head on the glass and looked, slit-eyed from the glare of the flashing sky, down the aisle.

A woman in wire-rimmed glasses with long, black hair sat watching him, five rows down, her eyes rimmed under red. She had been crying. She looked right at him and it made him uncomfortable. She could see what he had done, what he tried to hide, as if it were a stain on his shirt, a wound bleeding through. He sat up and touched his neck self-consciously. His arms prickled hot. His breathing thickened. Everything slowed down and enlarged—her face filling his vision, his vision swimming as his eyes teared, the seats smearing into a green sea rising, the red-white-red-white sky falling, the train-rumble shaking in his head, his throat opening and swallowing air until he choked. The woman lifted her hand and deliberately turned it palm out; he saw stigmata at her wrist, blood dried around the crusted wound, dry rivulets running down along her forearm. She closed her hand into a fist. She tapped the back of her wrist, raised her eyebrows. She mouthed the word, "Time."

She only wanted the time. She couldn't see him, not everything. He released a breath. He tried to keep himself steady so she wouldn't know, so no one would know. He closed his mouth tight and raised his arm, showing his empty wrist. He didn't wear a watch. He mouthed the words, "I'm sorry," stopping when he saw the stigmata at his own wrist, the blood fresh and bright as the red of the flashing sky. He started awake.

He awoke from his dream into closed-in darkness. He lay on hard wood. Even before he reached out, he knew he would touch more wood just inches above his face. He sensed it before he felt it. He smelled the fresh-cut wood. He smelled earth and tasted the sweetness of decay. He kicked out, his shoe thudding on solid wood again. He felt to his sides. Buried alive, he began to dig frantically, scratching at the wood with his fingernails, the darkness screeching in his ears.

HE AWOKE TO DARKNESS AGAIN. He lay curled up in the front of the wooden box, dirt packed in the bottom. He rose up; he could kneel now, his head brushing the jagged top of his tunnel.

He shook his head to clear another dream. In his dream, he lay on his back in tall grass watching clouds

BY DAVID SANDNER

Illustration by Eric Dinyer

slipping by impossibly fast, like in time-stop photography. Susie laughed like shattering glass, sharp, shrill. He hated her at that moment, hated her for not stopping him.

"Yes," she had said. "I promise. Together."

He pushed himself up on one elbow. She licked her upper lip, wiping away a drop of blood from her nose. Tension gave her nose bleeds. She held a bottle half-golden with whiskey crooked awkwardly against her chest, her arm palsied with drunkenness. Her eyelids drooped and her eyes were dull and unfocused, as if she were already dead.

"Promise," he said. "Promise me," he said desperately.

Her chin dropped to her chest and her mouth moved wordlessly. Her eyes drooped closed.

"I said yes," she said loudly, looking up as if suddenly remembering him. "Yes."

He took her hand in his.

"It will be like you said—like where the mountains touch the quiet of the sky, like in that poem. Promise."

"Yes. I said, yes," she said irritably, her hand jerking back from his. The bottle slipped away, breaking, shattering his dream open into darkness.

She hadn't died. He guessed that much already. He could feel, at his wrists, tight bandages, and beneath, when he had torn them open, jagged tears in his skin, tears that had never healed. He could slip his fingers in and touch the bone. The wounds did not hurt him at all. He remembered the sharp slice of pain as he slit his wrists. He knew he had not been buried alive.

He had needed only one waking to scratch through the coffin. He needed only two more hours after his second dream to cave in the dirt above him, push it aside, and climb out into the open air. The dark emptiness of the sky alarmed him after his dream of flashing red and white. The first thing he saw, in the blue light of the Moon, were his own hands reaching out, ragged from digging, silhouetted against the empty sky. Raw bone poked out from the ends of his fingers, flaps of skin and strings of tendon hanging down. He felt nothing in them any more. He pulled himself from his grave and lay back on the earth to rest. The grass smelled dry and brittle. Someone had laid roses at his gravestone. Susie. No one else would have come. He lay on his back looking out at the oppressive sky, the Moon a smear, the stars so many shiny fingerprints on dark glass. He was crying. He cried at the sheer effort of digging, tears running into his ears. He didn't want to die.

When he sat up, he looked at his tombstone.

LEONARD GOBBELLI

With the dates of birth and death carved in simple stone. Only his grandmother had ever called him Leonard. He hated the name. And Gobbelli was the name of a father he never knew. The name had only reminded him, his mother, and his grandmother of something they would all rather forget. And he wore a dark suit, stained now with dirt and blood. He never wore suits. Not that any of it mattered now. Leo pushed himself up to his feet. The graveyard was deserted. The rows of tombstones in the stark moonlight made him edgy. He half-expected to see others digging themselves out of their graves, the earth sprouting dead, bony hands and grinning skulls. He had to climb the fence to get out. He walked home along an old paved road with dirt shoulders, hiding in the bushes whenever he saw headlights. There were no lights on at his home, at Susie's home, when he arrived.

They had lived in a small free-standing house, separated from neighbors by an overgrown yard and the deep shadows of a copse of trees. Paint flaked off the water-discolored walls and one of the front windows was covered by cardboard. The window had been broken for the past three months. Leo had broken it himself trying to kill a spider with a broom. It had been stupid and funny, making them both laugh. The familiarity of it made him frown. He walked up the dirt driveway. At the back he found an open window. He heard voices. Dirty, frayed, he didn't want to be seen. He crouched and crawled forward until he had pushed his way up under the window. He felt like Frankenstein's monster looking in at his maker; he had become something hideous and best forgotten. Susie was crying.

The other voice belonged to Tom, their friend, her friend, from college. Tom had moved to town five years past. He and Susie had met sometimes for coffee, especially when she needed time away from the house. Leo had never been jealous. He knew he had been unbearable sometimes, prone to fits of rage. But he was never jealous. He thought it over clearly, as if hoping that he might alter the reading of some ledger of his life, freeing him from the present nightmare. Had they forgotten he had never been jealous, had never hit her, only yelled? He admitted he had said the most hurtful thing he could think of, had been harsh, critical, demanding. He admitted it in hope of mitigating it somehow, but nothing changed.

Tom whispered, soothing. The words were indistinct, but thick, shuttered. By the rising and falling of their breathing, Leo realized that Susie and Tom were making love; while she was crying and he was whispering, they made love. He thought he should cry or shout, but he only sat with his back against the wall below the open window and put his arms around his knees. He had an erection, had one since he had awoke in his coffin. It was not sexual, but only *rigor mortis*. He felt it now through his pants but he had no desire. He wanted to feel desire. Desperately, he began to touch himself, thinking of Susie moaning as her moaning with him, closing his eyes, but he felt nothing. He turned and knelt by the window, peeking through at the lovers on the bed in the moonlight.

They must have begun to make love suddenly for Tom had his pants around his ankles and Susie had her dress, unbuttoned, bunched up at her waist. Tom still wore a red shirt and a green fatigue jacket. Leonard pushed the window open farther. It squeaked upon its hinges. The lovers did not notice. He climbed in through the window and looked at them. He felt he could not be seen, and he stood arms raised from his sides in tragic loss, his palms out flat. Susie gasped when she saw him. Tom glanced back, then fell away from her onto the floor, terror in his eyes, the whites glowing with reflected moonlight. Leo stood before Susie and reached out with torn, rotting hands. He bent over her and kissed her.

"Leo," she said, kissing him, pulling him on to her. He fumbled with his pants and they made love. She cried and held him close. He cried because he felt nothing.

"You're so cold," she said.

When she tried to interlock her fingers with his, she felt the ragged bones of his fingers. She gasped.

"Oh, God," she said. "What are you?"

She pushed him away. He moved back, stumbling with his pants half off; he turned away into the darkness, away from the moonlight at the window, to zip up his pants.

"Susie."

The wrongness of it all muted him. He felt like an adolescent caught touching himself. Or worse. Not simply embarrassment, not simply naked desire, but a desire for desire, for what he could not have, a perversion, something dead that wouldn't stay dead. He couldn't speak. He didn't want to be seen. In everything, his ragged fingers, his bloodless skin, his stiffening joints, he was a perversion. And he had brought himself on her and made her part of it.

"Oh, God," she said.

He saw Tom still on the floor. When their eyes met, Tom said, "I didn't know."

"Turn on the light," Susie said.

"No," Leo shouted. His voice did not sound like his voice, lower,

When she tried to interlock her fingers with his,

stiffer, the voice of the dead. "Let me go. I won't come back."

The last was a lie and she knew it.

"Turn on the light," she commanded. "Tom, turn on the light."

Tom stood, crossed the room and, reaching out with a shaking hand, turned on the light.

Tom shrank from him. Susie stared right at him. She wiped a line of blood from below her nose with the back of her hand.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

HIS MOTHER HAD DIED in an auto accident when he was eight. At 16, he had killed his grandmother's cat by swinging it around by the tail and slamming it into a garage door. He had stomped on the body until he couldn't stand himself any more. He had taken the streetcar out to the beach and smoked a cigarette and watched the surf. He swam out into the ocean until his arms were tired, diving into the rip tide and oblivion. The current brought him unconscious to the shore.

As he lay recovering at General Hospital, his grandmother only said, over and over, "I don't know what were you thinking."

He knew it meant, "How could you have failed?"

LEO WATCHED AGHAST as the sky blazed orange-white fire, gouts of flame dripping to the earth. He put his hand on the warm window pane. He saw his fingers whole again. He flexed them.

"Where am I?" he said.

A touch on his other arm made him turn. The woman on the train was his mother. The straight, black hair, the glasses, even the eyes rimmed under red. He hadn't remembered. Embarrassment contracted his stomach until it hurt sharply.

"I'm sorry," he said, hunching his shoulders. He had failed her again.

He felt it like a bad taste in his mouth, a sudden anger.

"You're too late," he blurted. He couldn't sort his emotions out. "I'm sorry," he said again.

She drew up her arm and tapped the back of her wrist again.

"Time," she said.

"What are you talking about?" he said bitterly. "Where am I?"

He awoke to the sound of the mallet hitting the stake and felt the first sharp entry of the stake into his chest. He gasped and grasped the stake, opening his eyes wide, trying to speak but tasting only blood welling up in his throat. A dark gas escaped from his chest with a sound like a loud fart.

"Again," Tom said fiercely, standing beside his grave.

Susie drew the mallet back and hammered the stake deeper into his heart. He hated her for it, gritting his teeth and trying to scream, spitting out blood. The blood also splattered from his chest. But no, not blood, he realized, but a gray matter, tinged copper.

"God," Tom said, turning away, covering his nose and mouth.

"That's it," she said, "it's through."

He had been spurting out his own decomposed organs. He sat up and turned, gagging.

Susie, smattered with gray fluid, climbed out his grave and moved away, shaking her arms, the gray matter dripping from her. She fell and retched. He stood up in his grave and peeked over the edge at her. He pulled the wooden stake from his heart and dropped it in his coffin. He could have choked them both in his rage, even as he admitted that the stake had been his idea. He had returned to his grave before morning, unsure of what might happen otherwise, and told them to break into the graveyard the next evening, after closing. It had been a terrible idea.

"Don't just stand there," he said, gritting his teeth. "Help me out of here."

He held his arms up and reluctantly Tom came forward to help him out of the grave.

LEO STOOD IN THE BATHROOM and looked at himself in the mirror, trying to remember his grandmother's word for what he had become. He looked for a long time at the wreck of himself, his skin mottled and leathery, his eyes bulging and white, the gaping wound in his chest, angry and oozing puss like a sore. His face had puffed up and his skin had become pinkish-purple. His body was alternately distending with internal gases and sagging with rot. At least the *rigor mortis* had given way and his joints now felt loose and pliant. He washed his hands in warm water, hoping to bring back some feeling, but he felt nothing. His hands only bloated with the water. He hadn't had to go to the toilet since he awoke the first night. His body simply didn't function that way now.

Susie made tea in the kitchen. He could hear her and Tom whispering. That first night, once he had stood up and turned on the light, Tom had wanted to leave. Both Leo and Susie insisted he stay. The distance between them—between life and death—would only have become obvious if they had been left alone. Besides, there was something they could not talk about. Her betrayal. She had let him die alone.

Vrykolakas, that was the word he wanted, that was what his grandmother would have called what he had become. It was an old greek word for a revenant, a vampire. Not in the traditional sense; he didn't suck blood, he could see himself in the mirror. A stake through the heart would not kill him. The dead returning to plague the living, though, that was what he had become.

He came out of the bathroom and crossed the living room to his favorite chair, a dark orange recliner worn at the arms, the seat sharply indented from use. In the kitchen, Susie and Tom abruptly stopped whispering. He sat down in the chair and picked up a book, still dog-eared, from the coffeetable nearby. He had been reading it only last week. He opened the book and began to read, but the words wouldn't hold still, seemed to slide away when he looked at them directly. It scared him. Susie came in with two cups of tea and handed him one. He lay the book aside quickly and put the tea down beside it on the table. He feared what might happen if he ate or drank anything, especially now with a hole in his chest. Tom came in and stood behind Susie.

"Tom said, maybe we didn't do everything we needed to."

Susie had showered and changed but Tom still wore his fatigue jacket and jeans, brown stains along his right side.

"Maybe we need to put garlic in your mouth and . . . ."

Leo looked up.

"... cut off your head."

He shook his head. "You'd just bring my talking head home for the mantle. Would you like that?"

"Come on," Susie said, frowning. She sat on the edge of an old couch covered with a bedspread and leaned forward, her hands together on her knees. "What do you want?"

"Are you sleeping with him?"

Something was wrong with their faces. They had enlarged and distorted as if in a funhouse mirror. Their faces loomed huge and hideous in his sight, the pores speckling their noses and cheeks, their eyes bulging as they stared at him.

Susie answered. "No."

He looked at her. "Are we sleeping together?"

"No."

"It's because we made a pact and I died and you didn't," he said. "That's why I'm here."

Everything in the room became indistinct, as if the colors leaked out into the things beside them, smearing all together, swirling everything into one. He reached out blindly toward Susie, sweeping his book and the hot tea from the coffeetable. The tea spilled down his legs. He felt nothing.

she felt the ragged bones of his fingers. She gasped.

"If you loved me," he said. "You love him instead."

Tom knelt beside him, perhaps to clean up the spill, but Leo was startled. He stood up. His vision cleared a moment. What was going on? He lunged at Tom, but he had no strength in his body. Tom held him and pushed him back, easing him down into his chair as one might ease an old man into his sick bed.

"You promised me," he shouted. "It's a curse."

"What?" Tom said.

"You can't have her."

Leo pushed Tom away and struggled to his feet again.

"It's your fault. I'm rotting away. It's your fault."

He felt ashamed. He walked unsteadily to the door and went outside. He slammed the door. He stood in his front yard, trembling with rage. He didn't want to go back to his grave. He went around the house to his work-shed. He fished the key from the trim above the door. He opened the padlock and pushed the door open. He screwed the bulb in tight to its socket until the light came on. He let go and the bulb swung from a cord, swaying the shadows. The light reflected on pieces of polished silver hanging on the walls and scattered on his work-bench. He had done preliminary silverwork out here for belt buckles, necklaces, earrings. He had access to a forge in town and had sold his work through an artist's collective. He looked at his tools, picked up some pieces of loose silver. He had come here when he had needed a place away from the house, when he had been angry. He ran his fingers along some of the finished pieces hanging at the back. He admired the intertwisting designs in the silver, looping and twining. He felt relieved that out of all that time angry he had made something beautiful. He sat at the work-bench and drew designs on paper, lines curving in upon themselves, circles within circles interlocking with more circles, flowers with stems intertwining. He drew until close to dawn. He unscrewed the hot bulb without feeling anything in his bone fingers. He walked outside, returning the key to its place and locking the shed. Susie and Tom were shouting as he passed the house. He walked past without stopping.

His vision shifted again. He noticed it with the mailbox first, a shimmering, the same shifting of perspective he had noticed in the house, an enlarging of things in his vision. The red, dull metal of the mailbox seemed to intensify as he watched, to become bright and distinct, full to bursting with vibrating light. He looked around, stunned. He could see, clearly see, that everything was made up of vibrating light, the house and trees, everything. He could see the light circulating like blood through a body. He walked along the road to the cemetery with his hands in his pockets, in awe of the world around him. Once, when a car passed and caught him in its headlights, he stood on the side of the road watching a tree, each branch sharply in focus against the tangle of branches behind, each impossibly clear and bright, each leaf shaking and every branch straining to reach out toward the sky. The light of the passing car skittered through the branches in a complex mosaic of light and darkness. He didn't even try to hide. He stood in shocked silence. He knew everything had always been like this and he hadn't noticed. But it seemed impossible.

The world continued to sharpen until it became difficult to focus on it. Everything seemed too close to define, the clear lines of the trees, the road, the houses and fences sharpening, drawing out tight into thin, crystalline filaments of light, of reflection and abstraction. By the time he reached the graveyard, everything had become shapes and color, hardly separate things any more, just complex knots of lines and light. He climbed over the fence into the graveyard and fell onto his back looking at the sky. He laughed. As he watched, the stars seemed to brighten. Other stars winked into view. The Milky Way began to shine with the waxing light of countless stars. Soon he would see everything. The sky filled with light as his vision cleared until he could see them all. The sky at night wasn't dark at all. It shone with a million million suns just beyond sight. He began to cry.

Gouts of flame licking up over the horizon indicated the dawn. He understood for the first time why a vampire might fear the light. The Sun would be too much. Even in the shade, even inside, it would be like looking straight into the Sun. He climbed into his coffin, pulling dirt in on top of himself. He could feel warmth in the earth. He could feel the dirt shifting, pulsating with life, breathing, moving all around him as he fell into a deep sleep.

HE TRIED TO KILL HIMSELF AT 20, the year his grandmother died and he dropped out of college.

He took a bottle of sleeping pills in his flat in New York. He awoke three days later in a pool of vomit thick with half-digested sleeping pills. He had a terrible headache and felt so ashamed to have failed again that he didn't mention it to anyone.

A WOMAN SAT NEXT TO HIM ON THE TRAIN, leaning in to him and resting her head on his shoulder.

"Leo," she said softly.

It was Susie, and they were together again, running away. She was drunk and peaceful, gripping his hand tight after crying and crying until she was spent.

"Oh, God, no," he said.

He turned to her. It was his mother. She sat up, licking her fingers and pressing his hair to his forehead, out of his eyes.

"You'll be all right," she said.

She was about his age, the age she had been when she died. He realized that was why he hadn't recognized her before.

"Where are we?"

The train passed into darkness. He reached out and took her hand.

"Why did you leave me?"

"I'm sorry."

He shook his head.

"I'm sorry. You didn't mean to."

"Yes, I did. I killed myself, like you. I'm sorry."

He felt a sudden hollowness in his chest, fear and shock. He wanted to make her stop speaking.

"Are we cursed?" he said. "Is this hell?"

"No."

"Then why are we in darkness."

"We are coming to light ahead. I have only been waiting for you."

"You didn't have to."

"It wasn't long."

He craned his neck to look ahead. He desperately wanted to see something ahead.

"Can you forgive me?" she said

"I can't see it."

"Ahead. There."

"Where?"

"There."

"Yes."

"It's time."

"Is that what you were saying before?" He laughed uneasily. "I thought you wanted to know the time."

She squeezed his hand.

"I can't go yet," he said. "I have to do something. After?"

"O.K.," she said.

"First, sit and talk to me."

"All right," she said. "That would be fine."

THE NEXT NIGHT, AS HE CLIMBED OUT OF HIS GRAVE, Susie sat waiting for him. She had been drinking. He lay beside her in the grass and gravestones, looking at the trees beside the graveyard, across the road, and at the bright night sky. Things close by—Susie's face, the gravestones around him—seemed too close in his acute vision, making him slightly dizzy and ill. The trees especially had changed again. The lines had become thin scratchings that puzzled him. Words, he realized. The world had become made up of words, fine tangled lines of cursive writing and hieroglyphs in everything, written with the filaments of light. In every leaf of every tree, meaning,

Continued on page 78

R. A. SALVATORE

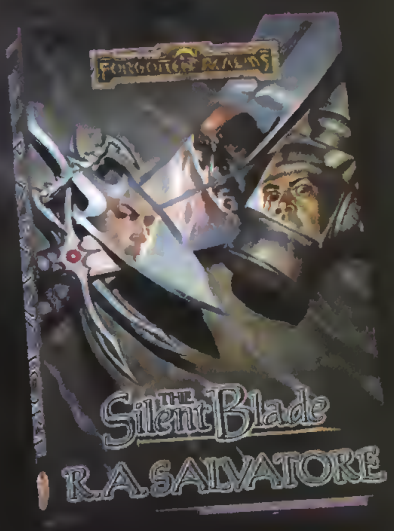
They meet again.

Wulfgar returns from the horrors of the Abyss to find there are some demons a hammer cannot crush.

Entreri has used his dagger to carve an empire from the streets of Calimport. Now he seeks the head of his oldest foe.

Drizzt waits, for his weapons cannot battle Wulfgar's despair or keep Entreri from growing in power. He learns that not all wounds bleed. And not all blades kill.

The Silent Blade.



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Male readers beware—this story might annoy you. But pay attention, there will be a test afterward. It's called your life.

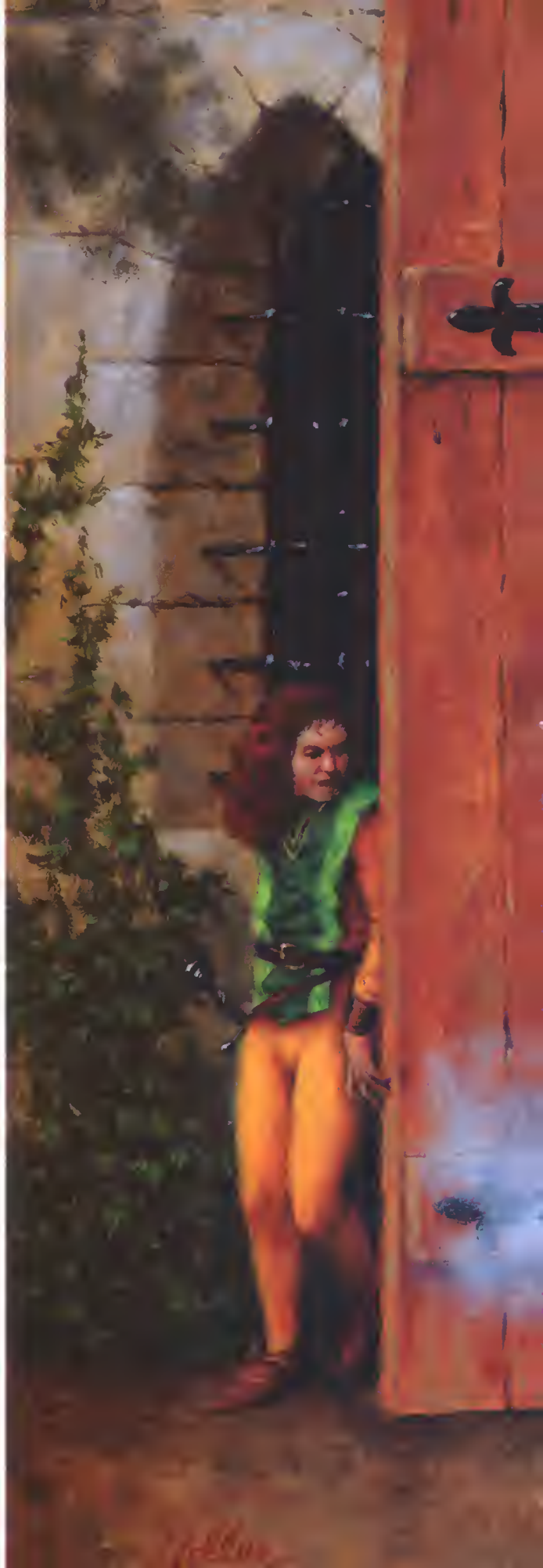
The Secret in the Chest:

WITH TESTS, MAPS, MYSTERIES, & INTERMITTENT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DARCIA WAS PLANTING SEEDS IN THE GARden when a flock of vampire geese tore through the sky overhead, screaming. Her fingers stilled in the dirt, and a thrill of sexual excitement shook her. They burst into that noisy flight only when a knight had entered her land, coming up northward from the Shaggy Bridge.

Maybe this time he would be a good one.

The Bridge was nine miles south of the castle, so Darcia had time to run inside and get clean. She bathed and chose a light green dress. It took a few more minutes to comb the tangles from her hair until it was sleek and shining. Then she climbed four flights of stairs and jogged down the long dark corridor to



BY FIONA KELLEGHAN
Illustration by Steven Adler

the special room at the end. She had left the big golden key in the lock. Panting with eagerness, she unlocked the door and went in. The room was pitch black.

"Hurry," Darcia whispered, as she always did, though she knew there was plenty of time. The knight wouldn't reach the castle for at least a half hour.

She struck a light from the tinderbox on a shelf and lit the torch on the wall. Then she turned to the great gilded chest carved of ancient oak.

Darcia knelt before it and heaved the lid up.

She knew all the items in the chest intimately. This antique box hid her most private and precious possessions, including her diaries, souvenirs of bygone romantic liaisons, and other confidential keepsakes.

Some masks lay tumbled together on the right side. She always suffered indecision in choosing one, and she held up one after another. Darcia looked young and beautiful already, with a long tumble of hair sometimes rosy-blonde and sometimes dark, but she always felt a little more confident if she wore one of the masks.

At last she selected one and smoothed it onto her face. It fitted her like her own skin, and was indistinguishable from it. Then she tugged at the lid, and it fell with a crash.

Darcia said aloud, "Please be a good one." At this stage, she felt hope, even optimism. There would be plenty of time for the inevitable disappointment later.

She closed and locked the door, and jogged back through the corridor and down the stairs to her bedroom. She hid the key inside a small inlaid box in the great dragonbone chest of drawers. Then she looked around the room. Yesterday's clothes were piled in a heap on the bed, which was unmade. She stuffed the clothes into a closet and arranged the blankets neatly. It was unlikely the knight would see her bedroom before she could tidy it better, but you never knew.

Then she panted downstairs and went out into the front garden.

Darcia had arranged a pleasant path for the knights to follow northward from the Shaggy Bridge. Only the most stubbornly brave would ignore it for the trees and brambles she'd planted to either side. These trees were hundreds of years old by now, and the brambles were a nightmare, and so far only one thick fellow hadn't followed the path. Usually after they'd made their way through the Zombie Swamp, the Dragon Peaks, or Hag Forest—or, if they were particularly adventurous or unlucky, all three—they were grateful for a cheerful grassy slot and would come all unsuspecting up to her home.

"Come on, darling," she said, her hands clutched under her breasts, standing on tiptoe as though that would help her to see over the hill to the south of the castle. "A damsel in distress needs rescuing."

It had been a year since the last knight. As the decades went by, she observed that the men did change. Sometimes they were brutish, sometimes chivalrous. But they had not changed enough. She would be imprisoned here until a new kind of man came along.

Darcia is one of many imprisoned ladies in fantasy and fairy tales. Her name may not even be Darcia— it could be Circe, Penelope, Elaine. Their prisons are of various shapes, but the women have one thing in common: They wait for a man to come. Without the man, their stories would not have been told.

THE KNIGHT FINALLY CAME INTO VIEW, HIS MILK-WHITE HORSE walking, its head low in weariness. Darcia shaded her eyes against the late sun to see him better. Young, of course, and fresh-faced. He had a sword at his side, of course. It probably wasn't his. Probably some king or other had given it to him, along with some quest or other. A glint on his chest suggested a coat of mail beneath the cloak. He had probably felt like a true grown-up warrior, putting on mail like that. By now, though, he would be tired of its weight.

Pretty soon he saw her, but he came on at the same slow gait. She amused herself by trying to decide what that meant. Maybe he was cautious after the dangers he'd been through, though young men usually weren't; or maybe he figured he could defeat a single young woman without any trouble, if it came to fighting; or maybe he was afraid that she was a witch, which she wasn't; or maybe he was just being kind to his horse.

Most likely, he was thinking that it was about time that his luck turned good, and that after all the monsters he deserved to spend the night with a princess, and he could see that she wasn't going anywhere.

She was not exactly a princess, though the knights always thought she was. That implied a royal family. But she just lived all alone there, and lonely, in a castle in the midst of a wide wild land.

At last his horse plodded over the grass and halted before her. The young knight swung himself to the ground with a thud.

"Hail, lady," he said. "I'm Sir Palavere. My horse and I are tired out. We'd appreciate it if you would give us shelter for the night."

"You're very welcome to stay," she said earnestly, extending her hand for him to bow over. "Please stay as long as you like. My name is Darcia. You must be very tired."

"I'm beat," he admitted. Palavere looked grimy, too. Most women would call him plain, even a little silly-looking, but Darcia thought he was beautiful. He was just an inch taller than she, and had curly red hair and pale skin.

"I bet you've had to fight lots of dragons," she said, her voice full of sympathy. "And ogres and zombies."

"I did indeed," he said, "though I ran away from as many of them as I could."

"Wise move," she said seriously. Hope leaped within her. "I do hope you'll stay for a while, and rest and refresh yourself." She stepped closer and gazed into his gray eyes. "I've been awfully lonely here. I haven't seen another soul for a year."

"My lady!" he said. "Are you imprisoned here?"

"Yes, I am, in fact," she said. "It's a nice prison, but I do get lonely. Are you on a quest?"

HE LOOKED NOBLE. "THE PEOPLE OF MY VILLAGE ARE under a curse. I seek the Well of the Gargoyles, who guard the magical book of the White Hierophant, which will tell us how to lift it."

Darcia nodded. "I can tell you how to find the Well, if you like. And I can give you the Shield of Adamant that'll protect you against the Gargoyles. They can be nasty. And I'll tell you the words that will free the clasp so that you can open the book, if you want. It's a lot harder to open if you don't know the words."

His mouth opened in astonishment. "You would do all that for me? I thought I had to slay the Red Wyvern first, and take its teeth to the Wizard of the Black Pool in exchange for the magic words."

"Sure, you could go to him," Darcia said. "But I know the Hierophant's words as well as he does. And he's a long way east out of your way. Besides, somebody misled you. Wyverns don't have teeth."

Palavere gazed at her with gratitude.

"But I hate to tell you this..."

"What?" he asked, stepping closer. She smelled his sweat, and dizzied with excitement.

"I'm afraid that if you *do* want me to give them to you, you'll have to pass three tests. But," Darcia hurried, "they aren't dangerous, life-threatening ones, mostly, and I'm sure *you'll* have no problem with them. And if you pass them, you can earn a great treasure besides the shield and the magic words, if you desire it."

"What treasure?"

"That will become clear later," she said.

Palavere sighed. "Well, they wouldn't be the first tests I've had to pass. Do I have to do them straight away? Or can I have a bite to eat first?"

Darcia waved her hand, the gesture suggesting that the tests were of little consequence. "Of course you can eat. But you'll have to eat out here. I can't let you into the castle until you've solved the first test. But you can take as long as you like to begin. Rest

up, regain your strength."

Palavere shook his head. "I can't help thinking of my people languishing under the curse. The sooner I finish this quest, the better."

"As you wish." Darcia turned to hide her disappointment. The knights were always in a hurry. "You can start the first one straight away, if you want. It requires some thinking, but you can eat while you think. Let's bring your horse to the Stable."

He took the reins of his milk-white horse and followed her, telling her about some of the adventures he'd had. Darcia sympathized at all the proper moments. She had heard a lot of these stories, but she always enjoyed them. It was a long walk around the castle to the Cunning Stable and she led him slowly.

Darcia liked Palavere more than a lot of the others, so far, and wished that she could skip the ritual. But she had to go through the steps. She was trapped like a lady in a ballad that is sung again and again through the generations, forced always to do the same things, with only minor variations as the singer allowed.

The first test was mechanical. The second was perceptual. The third was personal. Most knights became good at either mechanical thinking or perceptual thinking, after tangling with Zombies and Hags. Most had solved the first two, to some extent, though they sometimes took weeks. So far, not one had achieved the third. It was possible that none ever would, though she had not yet despaired.

Discussion question: Do knights usually receive quests and tests from women or from other men?

PALAVERE'S EYES OPENED WIDE WHEN THE GREAT GOTHIC BUILDING came into view.

Just inside the Cunning Stable was a wide glorious stall, with a hay-filled bin carved of copper for horses to eat from, and a trough of silver for horses to drink from, and beautiful hooks of gold to hang their saddles from. It was clean and well swept. High upon the far wall hung a regal bejeweled sword. Horizontally across the front of the stall stretched two broad, polished, wooden beams studded with diamonds.

In the middle of this stall glared a vast black bull. Its eyes were red, and wisps of smoke rose from its large black nostrils. It pawed the ground and snorted when it saw Palavere.

Beyond the royal stall stretched rows of smaller stalls, all cramped and dingy. Cobwebs draped across the openings of many of them. The wooden partitions of the stalls did not all rest upon the ground, and more cobwebs formed a thick mat below and between them. The central aisle was 15 feet wide and thick with dust. At the far end of the aisle was a great set of double doors, closed.

"This is the first test," Darcia said. "If you want to shelter your horse in this stall, you must get the Bull out of it. You may not kill it. Although it may try to kill you, it doesn't care for knights, I'm afraid."

Palavere surveyed it sadly. Even the sword at his side seemed to droop. "Why can't I kill it?"

"Because it's against the rules of the test," she said in surprise. "He's the famous Black Bull of Dunglarry. Besides, he's the only bull I have. Or rather, he's the only bull the cows have. Anyhow, if you get him out of there, you win the sword up on the wall."

He looked at the sword and nodded. "Nice sword." He looked at the Bull. The Bull snorted in rage and trotted around in a circle. Little clouds of dust rose with each heavy step.

"I'm allowed to think about it?"

"Of course. Take as long as you like. I'll give your horse some water in the meantime. No need for him to suffer while he's waiting."

Palavere thanked her and went back to staring at the Bull. Darcia tugged the saddle and saddle-bags off the white horse's sweaty back and led it to a small outdoor trough on the western side of the Cunning Stable. It drank for a long time, exhaling in grateful snorts. Then she went back to the stable door and looked him up and down while Palavere, all unawares, studied the Bull.

He was muscled and had a neat little behind, though he was not one of your heroes with sinews bursting through his shirt. She presumed that he had been a skinny youth and had gained the muscles on his journey. He hadn't been able to get a haircut in a while; red curls wreathed around his neck. She longed to press herself against his back and run her hands down his chest.

But she said, "I'll bring you some dinner."

Palavere turned and smiled. "That would be great. I'm starving."

"I'll be just a minute, then."

She left him staring at the Bull. It glared back at him in fury.

Darcia hurried inside and gathered some bread rolls, some strips of salted fish, and some apples and grapes into a basket. Just a flask of cold spring water, though, to go with them. She would not give him any wine until he had solved this one.

When she got back to the Cunning Stable she found that Palavere was studying the rafters above the Bull. He took her basket with courtesy, then sat down on the saddle and fell to like a wolf. Darcia wandered over to a nearby peach tree and made a show of gathering peaches into her apron, though she kept a discreet and hungry watch on him.

After demolishing the food, Palavere got up to look at the beams across the royal stall. The Bull hurled itself forward and smashed into the barrier. Palavere stepped hastily back.

Eventually he called, "Am I allowed to look at the rest of the Stable?"

"By all means," she said, pleased. Rather unnecessarily she came over to his side to survey the Stable with him. Her apron was heavy with peaches and she cradled it awkwardly.

"What happens if I don't figure it out?"

"Then you and your horse must sleep outside."

"Is this the easiest test?"

"Well, it might be the hardest. That depends on you, on your wits. The second test involves a map. Maybe you're better at maps. The third one involves *not* doing something, but you don't need to worry about that now."

He spent a long time looking around the place, but he wasn't looking in the right direction. Darcia wandered back to the peach tree. Soon her apron was overfull and she had to bring them indoors. It would be more proper to wait inside anyway. She looked like an infatuated fool, busying herself in the immediate vicinity like that. But to whom would appearances matter but the two of them? She wanted to be near Palavere. He seemed to like looking at her, too. Besides, the peaches did need gathering, didn't they? She dumped the peaches into a bowl in the pantry and went back outside.

Several knights so far had figured out the puzzle of the Cunning Stable, but none had solved it in the way that she hoped for. A lot of them had simply killed the bull in frustration, and she had had to send for a new one. One clever man, long ago, a king of a southern island, had thought of prying up part of the roof and hauling the Bull out with a winch. It had taken him days to chop down some of her trees and build the parts he needed.

All of them had wound up spending at least the first night in the open.

AND PALAVERE WOULD TOO. THE SHADOWS LENGTHened across the green fields, until they were lost in a mist of indistinct blue-gray. Stars began to twinkle in the darkening east. At last Darcia regretfully said, "I must go inside now. I'm sorry. I can bring you a blanket, at least."

Palavere took her hand. "I feel awfully stupid."

"Don't," she said. "Other men have faced this test, and no one has ever solved it quickly. You're doing fine. It's a tricky one, I admit. You have to think tricky."

He smiled. "I'll accept that blanket."

"I'll bring it down right now," she said, and hurried into the castle. It was getting chilly out. She took two thick blankets and a pillow out of a cedar chest. He had to sleep outdoors, but there

was no reason why he should freeze.

Palavere accepted the beddings gratefully, and when he shook her hand he gazed into her eyes as though he didn't want to let her go.

Raise your hand if you thought the king of the southern island might be Odysseus.

DARCIA COULD BARELY SLEEP THAT NIGHT, THINKING OF THE handsome young knight out in the cold. She tossed and turned, hugging a pillow close to her chest. She frequently rose and went to the window and stared out into the dark, fancying that she could see him stretched out beside his horse, itself a pale blur in the night. Then she would leap back into bed and clutch the pillow. She pretended that it was Palavere, his head buried between her breasts. She spun quite a long fantasy about him, until the pillows were bunched here and there all over the bed, and hours passed before she fell asleep.

When she woke, the sun was climbing through the eastern treetops, flakes of gold fire turning their leaves into a toss of sparkling green jewels. She chose her favorite blue dress, since she knew she looked lovely in it. She put on a mask that accentuated the pertness of her nose and the graceful sweep of her cheekbones. While she readied herself, his face rose constantly before her. Darcia was too excited to eat, but she prepared a basket for Palavere.

She was always glad when the knights visited, of course, but some of them were more interesting than others, and Palavere interested her very much. He had a gentle, thoughtful manner. Perhaps that was the fashion in the courts this year. Or perhaps the men were finally changing.

Clouds were massing in the north when she went out to the Stable. The white horse was quietly grazing, but she didn't see Palavere, and a chill filled her stomach until he came around the side of the building.

He jumped guiltily. "Oh! Good morning. I've been looking at the outside of the Stable. Is that allowed?"

"Of course it is," she said, approaching him to offer her hand again. It wasn't necessary, perhaps, to shake hands quite so often, but he seemed happy enough to comply. "You can do whatever you want to do, so long as you get the Bull out of there without killing it. What did you see?"

"Well," Palavere said slowly, "I see that there are only two sets of doors, at this end and at the other. There is a paddock outside the other doors. But the Bull is at this end."

"And what does that tell you?"

"That the paddock should be at this end."

She laughed, and he looked quizzically at her. "You must think me very stupid."

"Not at all. You seem very bright. I'm sure you'll solve it soon."

"Hmm."

"I brought you some breakfast," she said, presenting him with the basket.

"Thank you, Darcia. This smells great." He sat down and began eating her hot jam cakes and cheese with a great appetite. But shortly he was back to pacing the Stable.

Darcia went inside and watched him through a window for a while. Then she thought of an errand, and strolled out to the strawberry knoll a little west of the Stable. The tiny wild berries were deep red against the grass, but she knelt on many by accident because she kept looking in the wrong direction. She hardly felt the time pass as she watched him. Sometimes he would lay a hand on the wooden beams of a stall, and her pulse would race. But then he would turn and go stare at the Bull again. It flicked its tail like a cat and snorted at him, occasionally working itself up into a fury and thundering in circles around the stall.

Mid-morning, Palavere discovered a clue: that the beams across the Bull's stall could be easily removed, but the beams barring every other stall were solidly nailed into the partitions and would not budge.

"They don't open!" he shouted. "You can't get into the other stalls."

"And what does that tell you?"

"That you don't use them. In fact, they're really too narrow for horses anyway. You'd be cruel to put a horse into any of those stalls."

Darcia hid her excitement, but he was still looking in the wrong place. She watched with appreciation as Palavere climbed up on top of the barrier opposite the Bull and carefully cat-walked down the center aisle, holding onto the diagonal ceiling struts. At the far end he hopped back down, and began working his way back down the Bull's side of the Stable. But he was looking in the wrong place.

At noon Darcia arranged a picnic lunch, and when big raindrops began to fall they sat on the saddle-bags in the dirt in the center aisle and chatted. He asked her about her imprisonment, and she told him honestly that she had been here as long as she could remember —forever, it seemed— all alone, except when knights visited.

"Have a lot of knights come here?" he asked, studying a roll of bread in his hand.

"Lots, yes. Mostly big dumb brutes," she said with a laugh. "Like you, they're always in a hurry to solve the puzzles and go off on their quests."

"I'm not in *that* much... of a hurry... any more," he said, raising his head and meeting her eyes. "In fact, I'm afraid that if I solve them, you'll make me leave."

"I won't, though," she told him. "I'd like it very much if you would stay. I get lonely here."

"I've lived in a town my whole life," he said, "but I get lonely too. There's never been anyone really special."

"No?" she said, pleased to hear it. Then she thought that maybe she sounded like she was complaining, and she didn't want Palavere to think her a whiner. "I mean, I'm used to solitude, and I appreciate my privacy, you know. Privacy is important too, after all."

"Yes," he said. "Privacy is important. Especially when you live in a small hovel with eight brothers and sisters. And a mother and father who want to know every little thing you're doing."

"That would be hard," she agreed. "Especially if you write poems or a diary. You don't want other people snooping around and reading them behind your back."

"I write poems, sometimes," Palavere said, sounding glad to discover this about her.

"But then, sometimes, you write something really fine and you wish there were someone special you could show it to. Then you feel a little lonely. And sometimes it's just *ages* before I see anyone. I do get very lonely here."

Palavere heard the yearning in her voice. He looked out the door toward the castle. "It's a big castle, and a big land. Awfully big for just one person."

"I know it."

"It's big enough for at least two. And eventually for children, and grandchildren."

"I like that idea very much."

Palavere frowned. "Has no one ever asked you to marry him?"

"Yes. And I refused them. They didn't pass the tests. But anyway," she said, trying to sound teasing, "you knights—I mean, most knights are always in a hurry to get on with their quests so they can marry some other girl who's waiting back home."

"I'm not," he said.

SHE SMILED WITH ALL HER HEART AT HIM.

"I mean, I'm willing to fetch the magic book and lift the curse and all that, but I just volunteered because nobody else would go. The old folks have been complaining for years about the cows giving thin milk and the beer always being sour, but nobody could be bothered to actually do anything about it. I said I'd go just so I wouldn't have to listen to them gripe any more. It isn't like I did this to impress some girl."

"You're unusual, then," Darcia said quietly. "Usually knights go on quests so that they can become rich and powerful and order the

She was always glad when the knights visited, of course, but some of them were more interesting than others....

prettiest girl in town to marry them."

"I'm not really a knight, either, not originally. King Graenwald made me one so that he could lend me a horse and a good sword to kill the Wyvern, which is all he really cared about, I think. But if I don't survive the trip he isn't exactly planning to make my family wealthy." He began to shred the bread roll.

"Maybe they don't need to be wealthy, as long as the cows give milk and the beer tastes better. A lot of people don't need much more out of life than that. Me, I'd give up this fine castle and estate in an instant to any of the girls in your village, if I could trade places with them, and have a townful of friends, and learn arts and crafts, and find a good man, and lead a happy productive life."

Palavere's bread roll was now a handful of crumbs, which he scattered out the door. "Why can't you do that? What keeps you here?"

"I'm trapped here by a, a sort of reverse quest. A kind of curse, I guess, though I didn't do anything to deserve it. But I will be free to go if ever a knight comes who can complete all three tasks."

"Do you mean that if I complete them, you might decide to leave?"

"I'm pretty sure I would. Unless I was offered a good reason to stay, which could happen, I suppose."

"Like what?"

"Like," she said softly, "if you wanted me to stay, and if you wanted to stay with me."

A shy silence hovered.

Palavere said, "You said before that the knight who passes all the tests can win a great treasure. I thought you meant a bag of gold or jewels. You offer a greater treasure than I had possibly imagined."

They couldn't look at each other then, and Darcia realized that neither of them could eat any more either. She excused herself, stammering, and went inside, where she walked up and down the vast main hall for an hour, eyes almost glowing with excitement, sometimes sighing, sometimes incoherently exclaiming.

Let him be the one. He could be the one.

It's just infatuation, she told herself. Don't expect too much. You ought to be more practical. So she went up to her bedroom and tidied it, and made the bed. That was a practical thing to do. All the same, she didn't stop smiling.

Then it occurred to her that he might be thirsty, and she hurried down to the Stable with a pitcher of water. The rain had blown away and the sky was as fresh as a song.

She found that Palavere had cleared the cobwebs from the fronts of the small stalls and was lying in the central aisle, swiping with a stick at the sections underneath them. The Bull turned its glowing red glare to her. She could see where it had scored the dirt with its mighty hooves, trying to reach Palavere whenever he had come close.

"Hi, Darcia," Palavere said, sitting up. He was grimier than ever.

"How's it going?" she asked.

"I've found something interesting," he said, his voice light with anticipation. "There are metal tracks in the ground, but these stalls aren't fastened to them. They aren't fastened to anything. They're held somehow above the floor."

She smiled. "Very good. I brought you some water." She placed the pitcher carefully beside his saddlebags.

"Thank you," he said, but it was clear his mind was on his task. "I'm beginning to wonder if this is a normal stable, and I think it isn't. Tell me, now, is this all witchcraft? Is this actually a ship, or something, that's magicked to *look* like a stable?"

"Um, no. It's not magicked," she said. She didn't really use magic very often. The real magic, she sometimes thought, was that she had kept eating right and exercising enough to keep her figure, even when months or years passed without anyone to tempt with it.

Palavere waited for a bit, then said, "That's a short answer. Am I getting warmer?"

"Yes," she said.

"That's short too."

"All right, you're hot. But I don't think you need any clues, you've come this far this fast."

Palavere threw himself on the ground again to peer underneath, and stabbed with his stick. A moment later he shouted, "They're on wheels!"

He soon figured out how it worked. All of the stalls except for the Bull's rested upon little wheels, and with some tugging they could be trundled back and forth across the central aisle or side to side. The wheels shrieked with disuse, and the stalls thundered as he shoved them here and there, creating a maze of wooden boxes. The Bull roared at the noise, but Palavere grinned like a pirate as he hauled them back and forth.

IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG TO REALIZE THAT THE BULL followed him, charging madly and headbutting the wall in hopes of reaching him, so that he could encourage it to move into the spaces where the stalls had been, and then roll them back behind it. In this way, he slowly maneuvered the Bull all the way up the Stable to the north end.

But there Palavere was stymied. He didn't see how to let the Bull out without getting into the same stall with it to open the doors and let it out to the paddock. He went around outside, but the problem was the same; if he opened it from outside, the Bull could still charge him. He would not be able to run to safety in time.

He puzzled over it all afternoon. He maneuvered the Bull back into a penultimate stall, and went outside and opened the doors, but the Stable would not allow him to move the last bar out of the way from a safe position. One way or another, he would be trapped in an enclosed space with the Bull.

At last Palavere said, "I can see only three ways to solve this. One: I could pull this last stall back and let it flatten me against the wall of the Stable, and I don't like that idea. No, there's also One-A: I could cut out a section of the Stable wall and pull the stall all the way outside, but then it would run off the tracks, and I don't want to ruin your Stable."

Darcia nodded. She remembered two knights who had done just that. It had taken a long time to rebuild the wall.

"Two: I could start a fire and burn this last stall. That would get it out of the way, but it might burn the whole building down. I

don't like that idea either."

Some knights had done that too. That had taken even longer to rebuild.

"Or three. I could ask you for help." He said it hopelessly.

Darcia exhaled. At last. At long, long, incredible, impossible last. Tears of joy blurred her vision. She took a deep breath and pressed the palms of her hands to her eyes. She went around outside and gathered a handful of grass and flowers, then went inside and slid the last bar out of the way. She held the grass out to the Bull. Its soft black lips nuzzled her hand as it ate her offering. Then it docilely followed her out into the paddock. Once it was outside, she patted its sleek hot hide, and stepped back inside and shut the doors.

Then she turned and smiled at Palavere.

He was staring at his boots. He looked haggard. "I failed."

"No, Palavere. You succeeded. You won. You solved it."

He looked up with incredulity and hope.

Darcia led him outside into the sunlight. "I know that men don't like to ask women for help," she said quietly. "Especially knights who are important enough to go on quests to save their towns. But that was the only way to solve the puzzle without killing my Bull or damaging my Stable."

Palavere looked lost. "I thought I had to solve it all by myself."

"I never said so."

"But that's the thing about quests. You have to do them by yourself."

"You had the help of the King. You were going to get the help of the Wizard. You were looking for the book that the Hierophant wrote. You just thought you couldn't ask for help from me."

He gazed at her in wonder.

"But!" she said, grabbing his hand. "But you did think it! You did do it. You won. Congratulations. You win the sword up there on the wall. Go ahead and get it. You have also just earned a night in the castle."

Palavere glanced in at the bejeweled sword. Then with a glorious face he grabbed her waist and swung her into the air. She fell into his arms laughing, her hair floating like a cloud all around him.

"Thanks for the bath. That feels a lot better," he said. She rejoiced in the way that his damp hair retained its curls. "Great to take off that coat of mail for a while. You'd be surprised how heavy it gets."

"I'm sure it does. Is rabbit all right for dinner, or have you been eating rabbit for weeks in the wild?"

"I've been eating weeds for weeks in the wild. Never could catch the damn things." He dropped into a chair by the fire with a sigh and watched her mince herbs. "When do I have to start the next test?"

"Whenever you like. I promise this one isn't as strenuous. You won't have to get out of your chair to solve it."

"That sounds great. Bring it on."

"Dinner first. It's almost ready. It's been simmering all day."

AFTER THEY'D EATEN, AND PALAVERE WAS RESTING HIS boots on the hearthstone and sipping red wine, Darcia went to the library and opened a drawer of the great bluewood desk at which she sometimes read books or wrote poetry. In the drawer was an ancient map on yellowed vellum.

She brought it to Palavere. "This is the second test. Study this map and tell me where the treasure is hidden."

He touched her arm and her face grew warm with pleasure. "You don't know how grateful I am that I don't have to face another giant beast, or change a river's course or something. But I bet this one will turn out to be even harder."

She smiled as she lit a tall silver candle and set it on the table by his elbow. Some of the knights had found it impossible. Many of them had at least figured out what the map represented, but then they had guessed unsatisfactorily about the location of the treasure.

Palavere settled the map against his knees and studied it.

After a moment he said, "It doesn't show any place names."

"No," Darcia agreed. She sat on the hearth by his feet, enjoying the heat and murmurous music of the fire against her back.

"Is this a map of an actual place?"

"The answer to that is both yes and no."

"Both yes and no," he murmured.

The vellum map depicted a mostly uncivilized region. At the north was a wilderness of woods, though a roundish clearing in the forest had an icon that appeared to represent a bounteous fountain. Further south, two great mountain peaks sheltered a wide land dotted with farms and orchards. A castle nestled at the foot of the mountains. In the center of the map was a cave, from which issued forth a river. At the bottom of the map was a stylized narrow cathedral, its high door and roof rising in a curve to a point. East and west were indistinct curves that might represent roads, or hills, or inlet shores.

"The castle is in the wrong place," Palavere said.

"What do you mean?"

"These mountains already protect the farms from the north. The castle ought to be down here, where it can protect the border...." He trailed off.

The fire crackled. While she waited, Darcia discreetly admired the long lines of his legs. She fantasized for the thousandth time what it would be like to take him into her bed. She hoped he did not have to remain celibate, as a condition of his knighthood. Some of the knights said that.

Of course, some of those same so-called celibate knights would very willingly take her to bed, and then when she told them they didn't solve all the tests correctly, they would get angry, and when they left they would call her a slut. They would accuse her of delaying their quests with her evil womanly wiles. It was true that she often wished the knights would stay, but she hardly held them against their will. And the seduction was always mutual. She would never try to seduce a man who was not interested. But they would insult her, and swear to spread her name as a byword of evil and corruption. It was very unfair.

She looked up at Palavere, at the red curls tumbling over his thoughtful face.

He would not be like the others. He had asked for her help.

Palavere said, "Ahhhhh. I think I see."

"You understand the map? That was quick," Darcia said. "Do you know where the treasure is?"

He raised his head, his eyes vague for a long moment. Then he looked at her and said deliberately, "The treasure is hidden everywhere, in every inch of the land."

Darcia opened her mouth. Then she threw her head back and laughed.

"Look out. Don't let your hair catch fire," Palavere said, leaning forward.

She scooted further away from the fire, still chuckling. "You'd better explain your answer."

"It's a woman. The map represents a woman's body."

"Very good."

"When I realized that, it seemed to me there were three obvious locations for the treasure. The Fountain, the Castle, and the Cave," he said. "That would mean your answer would be the head, the heart, or— somewhere a little lower."

"Why not the Cathedral?"

He waved it away. "That's just to show the shape of the empty space between her legs." He snapped his mouth shut, as though afraid he had spoken rudely.

Darcia smiled.

"A riddle like this, most likely it had to be one of the three. But I didn't want to have to choose one over the others. So I choose the whole thing. The whole body, mind, heart and all. Is that all right?"

Darcia laughed again in delight. "I have heard some ingenious explanations of why one of the three is the real treasure of a woman's body. No one ever tried to include them all before."

"But is it a valid answer?"

"Oh, yes," she said, standing up. "It's a valid answer. It's a wonderful answer."

Palavere's grin slowly went away. He lowered his eyes and studied her body silhouetted against the fire. Her filmy dress was

translucent against the firelight. He leaned forward again and took her hand, then pulled her into his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck and met his lips in a thirsty kiss.

After a moment he surged up out of the chair. Darcia wrapped herself around him, her legs tight around his hips, kissing him desperately. He murmured, "I'm ready for the next test."

She giggled against his lips. "Carry me up those stairs, Sir Knight."

His sword clanked against his boots as he carried her upstairs.

"Turn right. You're still wearing your sword," she said into his mouth.

"I never go anywhere without it," he panted, ducking so that her head would not strike the lintel. Then he shoved the door shut with a backward thrust of his boot.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, HE WHISPERED INTO HER BREASTS, "Did I pass the test?"

"Yes," she said dreamily. "Oh, yes."

But when morning came, of course, she had to tell him what the third test was.

"IT'S VERY SIMPLE," SHE SAID, AS SUNLIGHT TRICKLED THROUGH THE curtains. "There's a secret room on the top floor of the castle. It's my private room. All you have to do is not go in there. You can have all the rest. You can be the lord of the castle and the land. You can go anywhere else you like. You can do anything else at all that you like."

"Anything else? Including this? How about this?"

"Oh yes. Especially including that."

SEVERAL DAYS PASSED IN JOY AND SUNSHINE. THE APPLE trees were laden with juice-filled fruit, and wild honey dripped in the combs.

They planned the rest of Palavere's quest. Darcia would help him to finish it. She could even go with him, she said. They would undo the curse, and then ride back home and tell his people that it had been lifted. They would make sure that all was well with his family. Then they would be married, and come back here to the castle, and start their own family.

Darcia had never been so happy in her life. She could hardly believe that it was possible to be this happy. She wore no masks, and her long hair tumbled free. She had always been ready to be in love. Now she was in love beyond her fondest dreams. And Palavere loved her, body and soul.

They consulted maps, and read in her ancient books the legends about the lands to the north, and lore about the Gargoyles. They planned what provisions and gear to bring. They would go leisurely and safely. There was no mad rush. Thin milk and sour beer would not kill anyone, after all, and the villagers had put up with them for some years already. So mostly they talked, and took long walks hand in hand, and rolled about in bed.

But summer was drawing to an end, and soon they knew they must depart. Before long, snow would be falling about the Well of the Gargoyles. At last they agreed they were ready.

Darcia hummed as she gathered salted meat and dried fruit, and sang as she packed the saddlebags. Then she thought of a little item that she might take from her secret chest. She whistled a springtime tune as she climbed the stairs to her bedroom and looked for the golden key.

It was not in the drawer where she had left it.

Her heart became a cold stone.

She climbed the four flights of stairs. As she walked down the corridor she could see that the door to the secret room was open, and torchlight flickered within. Every step was a torment.

He was raising the lid of the chest. He leaped about when her shadow fell across it. The lid fell with a deadly thud, like that of an executioner's axe.

She looked at him steadily. Her eyes filled and tears ran down her face, but she looked at him steadily.

Palavere's face was white. "I thought there must be some final puzzle in here —"

"Don't lie, Palavere."

"You said you were under a curse. I thought there was something in this room, some cursed thing that kept you trapped here."

"Don't lie to me! You didn't think that. You didn't. All you thought was that you were curious and you wanted to know what was in here. You wanted to see my private things."

"I thought —"

"Don't say it. You didn't think. You just felt. You just felt curiosity and greed." She pressed her hands to her head. "Men always tell me that women are just windbags full of emotion. It isn't true. It's men who are full of emotion, full of desiring, full of conquering, full of greed to possess everything."

"Darcia, love, you know I —"

"I would let you have everything — my house, my body— I gave it all to you. The one thing I kept for myself was this small chest. You could not respect that one little thing was mine. Was the rest not enough for you? You had to have every last bit? You had to take the chest too?"

He sighed heavily. "I got only a glimpse —"

"I don't care about that."

He lowered himelf to sit on the chest. She wondered if his legs felt as shaky as hers, and violently hoped so.

"I heard a tale once," he said in a low voice, not looking at her. "It was about a knight who had done an evil deed to a maiden, and his punishment was to search the world and find out what it was that women really want. Finally he found a wise old woman, who told him the answer. She said that the only thing women really want is— to be obeyed in every thing."

"That sounds like a story made up by a man," Darcia said. Her tone lashed him. "What women really want, I can tell you this right now, is to be respected body and soul, the same as men are. Sometimes we need one private little corner in our life, or in our mind, that belongs just to us. Not to anybody else, not even our husbands. One small piece of privacy that represents us. But you couldn't respect it. You had to possess every single thing of mine. You had to possess me, all the way, down to the last inch."

She waited for him to speak, but he was silent.

Darcia turned to leave, but stopped in the doorway. "I guess you'd better go now. The bags are packed. Your horse is ready. Don't forget to bring the extra sword, it may come in handy."

"Darcia." He choked.

She waited to hear if he would apologize. *I'm sorry, Darcia. I was wrong. That was all he had to say.*

No knight had ever come close to passing this test. This was the hardest one, the most important one, and it was harder on her now than ever before. She did not know if she could survive a test as hard as this was now.

IT WASN'T OVER YET, THOUGH. SHE STILL HAD TO SAY THE words: *"if you fail this test."* Would he listen to her words, and understand?

"Darcia, I thought it would be something evil in there. I thought you couldn't vanquish the evil, but I could, for you."

"No. You know I would have told you if that was the case. I think you'd better go. I wish you well on your quest. I know you'll succeed just fine."

He followed her out, and she locked the door. They walked downstairs together. His white horse was waiting outside. The saddlebags were ready.

"What will you do?" he asked wildly. "Will you just wait for another knight to come? Will you sleep with the next knight who comes along?"

Darcia answered honestly. "I don't want any more knights. I love you. I wanted you to pass the tests. I wanted to stay with you for

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The mysteries of the world surround us, but though we look at them daily, we may never understand them.

BY PENI R. GRIFFIN
Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

Alice

Alice came from the red and golden town at the top of the view from my father's study window. I had from earliest times a fondness for that town, making my first attempts at poetry from contemplations of the variety of its light. When I met Alice I understood why.

We met at a class function of my mother's for the new crop of geography students. I was also in my first semester; but I had been born in the University, and all that was intimate to me was wonderful to her. It dawned on me that I had lived my life here solely that I might someday show her around.

We sat on the riverbank where the willows hang over the water and the cinnamon teal had raised her ducklings for 30 years. I do not go there anymore, but that day I lay without apprehension upon my elbows and watched her feet hover fishlike in the water. When she asked my field, I replied: "Everything. The totality of experience is my specialty."

"You must be an artist," she said. "Did you do the gold leaf murals on the men's dormitories?"

"The last of those was finished seven hundred years ago," I said. "I remember watching Dr. Albright's class do it."

"What kind of artist are you, then?" she asked, expression falling across her face like sunshine.

"I'm a poet, but I've only written practice verses so far."

"And when will you write real poetry?"

"About the time you go voyaging. I'm not older than you. I only look older because I've always been here."

All of that conversation is fallen into the River and drifted out to sea. What she said about herself I remember as if her voice this moment had fallen silent. "I love places," she says. "That's why I came here. I want to learn, but mostly I want to see the University. You know all about it, don't you?"

"No one knows *all* about it."

If you lean forward at that spot, beyond the reach of the willows, you have an unobstructed view of the mountains — blue and ethereal against a solid blue sky. If you lean back, they are striped with willow leaves. Alice leaned forward, the soft green folds of her bodice falling away from her bosom. "So you know where the River comes from?"

"The mountains."

"Where in the mountains?"

"It's fed by the melting snow and waterfalls."

"But where does it start being the River?"

"What odd questions you ask!"

"Not for a geographer."

After the function, she stayed to help my mother clean up and was invited to supper. She asked her question again over lemon pie and coffee in the library, and at first got the same answers. "But when does it start being the River?" she persisted.

"It's always the River," said my mother, laying aside her coffee cup and leading her to her favorite atlas, so large it had never lain upon a shelf, and its gilded pages so marvelously painted that, with a magnifying glass and a certain state of mind, I had often studied individual houses in cities I had never visited. Gently she turned the pages back to the first, in the extreme west of which the mountains wrinkled to the world's edge, and the River tumbled straight into the valley. Mother gave Alice the magnifying glass. "Take a look."

She bent over the broad page, her hair falling between her face and me. I crowded her, but she ignored me until she finished studying the spot, when she passed me the glass and made way. I peered through the lens, and saw the River emerging from a cave tall enough for a man to enter, albeit with wet feet. From these rocks, almost bare, the River fell in an asymmetrical tripartite waterfall.

"But where is it before then?" asked Alice.

"Before then?" said my mother. "Why — inside the mountain."

"Then where does it actually start? It doesn't rain inside a mountain, and you can't tell me the supply of underground water is inexhaustible."

"You'd have to ask a geology professor about that."

"What difference does it make?" I asked.

"I want to know. That's what the University is for."

"Yes," said my father, "but there are still things, thank God, that nobody knows. No one I ever heard of has gone under or over the mountains."

"Then I will be the first," said Alice.

I turned to the page where the city on the horizon — her city — was shown, and held the glass above it. "Which one is your house?" I asked.

The ghost in the graduate library had suddenly borrowed my pen and written

How do I describe the next 50 years? In my mind's eye, they shine too brightly to look at. My poetry improved a hundredfold — I have my professors' word on that — but I can no longer read it. It jingles in my head annoyingly, the outbursts of my incomparable happiness, ignorant of the shadow lying all the time upon my heels.

Yet Alice never strove to hide that shadow from me. As we roamed the open vistas of the University, and trekked down the River and into the countryside, it never occurred to me that her course would be any different from those of the geography students I had known all my life. They proceeded, always, down the River from the known to the unknown, exploring the vast valleys, taking ship across sea or sky, to find new continents, new planets, and endless horizons. I lacked Alice's affinity for places, which allowed her to merge in impartial sensuality with the crumbled house of the first founder or the clover of the prairie; still, I looked forward to the journey. We assumed that where she went, I would go, that my poetic destiny would be fulfilled in her, as I incarnated the poetry she felt in her nervous system when finding a new place.

We roamed the University hallways, rooms opening upon rooms, staircases leading us on forever. We boated down the River, over rapids and placids, through astonishing towns, gliding endlessly for hours through wildernesses of waterfowl and reeds. We opened the prairies, towns, and bluffs to each other; vista after vista, til it seemed we had nothing left to do but drift prematurely upward, into the explorable sky.

Any time I wish to hear her voice, I only have to press a mental button and she is as clear upon my eardrums as the cricket creaking now in the corner of my father's office. "When we go up the River —" "When we go to the mountains —" Her plans were detailed and practical, like our plans for a castle made of windows on Vision Bluff, and I took them no more seriously.

Seeing the thesis proposal in hard black and white was a shock, as if the ghost in the graduate library had suddenly borrowed my pen and written her name on the flyleaf of the book she peruses forever. "That won't be much of a thesis," I pointed out. "There's nothing there."

"You don't know that," said Alice. I think she was as much surprised that I raised any opposition as I was that she meant to go. "I want to see where the River begins."

"In a damp cave," I said.

We were in her dorm room, the shutters wide to night and her view of the River disappearing into the heights. Her room was small, smelling of woman and books, with maps all over the walls, and a bed just wide enough for the stage our love was in. "No one I know has ever been in a cave."

"You're the only one I know who's ever wanted to be in one."

"You don't have to go if you don't want," she said.

Panic fluttered around my clavicle. I took her hand between both of mine. "Of course I do," I said. "I just don't understand why anybody should go upriver."

"It's never been done."

"Probably because it's not worth doing."

Despite myself I created a quarrel, one I could only lose. I did not then understand my reluctance; only the image of the cave, a dark mouth spewing water over jagged rock, unwelcomed me.

Ours was the class that finished the Celestial Wing of the library. Alice, her mind on caves and cataracts, had not my enthusiasm for

the project, but we mixed mortar, hauled stone, and climbed scaffolding with the rest. Perhaps it was the vision of the cave that inspired the epigraph I wrote for the door. At any rate, the intensity of my invocation to the stars led the professor to choose my lines out of all those submitted. Alice was proud of me, in between fitting us for spiked boots and caulking the canoe.

My parents and my professor saw us off, a miasma of doubt hanging in the dawn mist. My mother remarked: "I've seen students set out to find their theses for two thousand years, but I've never seen one start off upstream before."

Alice smiled brilliantly. "Then we are pioneers."

We set off, Alice steering, myself in the bow. Although we had often paddled against the current on lesser expeditions, this time I felt that the kindly River urged us back, away from dead caves and murderous cataracts. The familiar University looked, from this backward perspective, like an undiscovered city, enchanted into sleep.

For the first days we were on familiar waters, fishing, camping, and making love in our accustomed places. Then we came to the foothills where we had practiced climbing, where the River ran narrower, through higher walls, and occasionally we had to portage. The unfamiliar angle of approach rendered these places strange and exciting, especially as we left the habitations of humanity behind. Wildflowers rioted upon the banks. Deer and fox, wolf and racoon, we disturbed in their spring scrawniness as they came to the river to drink. Broadwinged birds floated through the blue air while their smaller brethren flashed and called in the trees. Two days and nights we watched otters playing. The poem I would write swelled in me, its cadences drawn from Alice's voice, its images drawn from her eyes.

Portages grew more frequent, the days less warm, the trees more austere; until we were in the mountains. When we nearly swamped in the outflow, big with snow, of Maidenhair Falls, we stored the canoe and a reserve of food in a sheltered place ashore, packing the rest of our equipment into backpacks and donning the spiked boots and warm clothing. We had practiced on foothills and bluffs — even, once, on the University bell tower — and there is satisfaction in conquering steep, smug rocks. Animals and vegetation changed, as did the meter of my poem. Smoothing the transition would require work in the revision, but I laid that care aside, knowing that all things come in the proper time.

"Aren't you glad we came upriver now?" she said into my ear, as we lay in the roar of Cauldron Falls with the stars cold and content above the fire.

"I would be glad to be wherever you are," I answered. "Upriver or down, over sky or over sea — all places are wonderful, with you."

"Even caves?" she laughed.

"It's hard to vouch for something never seen."

"An unpoetic attitude!"

Cauldron Falls is a difficult climb, and we were at it the entire day, spending the night a stone's throw from the previous camp. We knew, because we tried it, and succeeded at last, by the full light of the Moon, in aiming a stone to land in our dead campfire.

Our progress was slow from this point but we were in no hurry, waiting out rain, taking such opportunities as offered to observe the wildlife. Did prevision of what was to come sharpen my enjoyment of each soaring bird, each dew-delicate petal, we encountered? I think not. I was reluctant to reach the cave, but Alice was so absorbed in each moment, no contrast brought my reluctance into contact with her eagerness. She looked up to the bare heights and the darkly visible spot where the water gushed forth, while I turned often to view the lands we had left. To see the world entire — and we came at last to heights whence I could see the straggling outskirts of sea towns — was worth the climb and the unorthodoxy of our direction.

her name on the flyleaf of the book she peruses forever.

The three cataracts deserved a poem unto themselves, but no poetry was possible within the thunder of their force. The hard white water had carved a smooth and twisting way through glittering granite — less the blind follower of gravity, it appeared, than the blazer of its own trail, admitting no obstacles. As we passed these falls we left the familiar trees behind, emerging at last upon a slope of cracking, precarious rock, where the wind set on us as if we had been burglars, and itself an outraged householder with a stick.

Alice cast herself upon the rock face, panting, her face glowing. The picture in the atlas, being many centuries old, was no longer accurate. The water issued from beneath an overhang like a snarling lip. The wind whined among the fissured granite, forcing spray and our own words down our throats. I shivered under my warm clothes.

"Not much of a journey's end," I shouted.

"That's because it's the beginning," Alice shouted in answer. "The western edge of the map." She seized the rocks on which she lay, and I started forward, almost losing my footing, as a gust tried to push her off the edge. My foot disturbed a loose stone, and set it plummeting behind me, the noise of its fall drowning in the descent of wind and water. She laughed, as if the transformation of the wind from element to assassin were a glorious thing. "Let's get under cover! This would be a poor time to lose ground!"

With some trepidation I crept after her, into the shadow of the cave. The River did not fill the mouth, and we passed in without much wetting our boots. Sunlight lay pale within for several feet. Beyond was only darkness, the sound of running water, and a damp, cold smell. Alice walked into the twilight where the Sun began to fade. I was seized by terror that, if she continued into darkness, she would never emerge.

"Stop!" I cried.

She turned, showing me a face both startled and amused. "What's the matter?"

"Don't — don't go any farther without — light," I said. "We don't know anything about caves. There's no hurry."

"You're right," she conceded. "Let's dig out the lanterns. We'll want to explore before we set up camp."

The lantern showed us water, bare stone, and darkness that led back to more darkness. The cave walls narrowed, and small echoes followed us, blending with the song of blood in my ears. I felt that intelligent eyes watched us, while voices whispered beneath the cover of echos, water, and our intrusive movements. Pale lichen spotted the rocks. Soon the cave was so narrow we had to walk in the creek bed, our spiked boots slipping and splashing, til we came to a waterfall, higher than our heads, descending loudly out of darkness.

"Well," I shouted. "This is it."

"Not quite." Alice took off her gloves.

"The River begins here. I'm hungry. Let's make camp."

"In a minute." She groped beneath the water for handholds.

"You'll get soaked. Do you want to catch your death?"

She climbed. I held the lantern as high as I could, approaching the fall's face as she crept out of reach of the light.

"You can't climb in the dark."

"I don't have to." Without her body, her voice was eerie, distorted and surrounded by a halo of echos. "It levels off almost at once. Just a minute — oh!"

"What?"

"Lew, bring the lantern up!"

"I'll get it wet."

"Hand it up, then!" Her hand reappeared, snatching at air; I rose tiptoe and gave the light to her.

"But what have you found?"

"I won't know til you come to look at it with me."

I climbed awkwardly, shrinking from the icy water. The echos and the liquid fall, the scurry of my blood, created the illusion of a tune, elusive and distracting. I crouched with her on a slick, broad ledge, where water tried to push me down again, and a sheer rock face soared out of the lantern light. Had this cave no roof? Alice balanced the lantern between her knee and her left hand, her face intense and impersonal. "Still not there!" she laughed. "I suppose we should go back and feed you."

The water emerged from beneath the cliff foot, with no more than six inches' airspace between the surface of the water and the lip of stone. The River — stream at this point — had carved a pool for itself, pausing momentarily before it began its rush to the valley. "It's as close as we'll get, anyway," I pointed out.

"Nonsense. I can get through there." She frowned in thought. "Light will be a problem, I grant you."

"Darling, don't be silly. For all practical purposes, this is where the River begins."

"Water doesn't spring from the center of the Earth," she said patiently. "I must follow it." She bent, peering into the blackness beyond the airspace. I started shivering. She rolled up her damp sleeve and thrust her arm through, groping beyond sight, her body pressed against the rock. Her eyes widened.

"Alice —"

"Wait!" She held up her hand for silence and pressed closer to the stone, nodding her head and silently shaping her lips. With an imperious hand she dragged me into place beside her. "Listen!"

I put my ear to the rock before her face, so close her features blurred and her breath warmed my icy nose. A rhythm vibrated on the surface — the tune that had pursued me up the fall. I started to tell her it was illusory, but she forestalled me with a gesture, beating time, and I heard words, sung by inhuman voices, emerge from the distorting undercurrents of sound.

"... can't get over it ..."

I snatched my head away. Alice laughed. "What sings in a mountain's heart? We must find a way through, now!"

"Alice, we are both hallucinating," I snapped. "Now, we're going back outside, putting on dry clothes, making camp, and having supper. In the morning, you'll be reasonable again."

"I'm not unreasonable now," she said, "but we need to give some thought to how we're getting past this wall. Go on down, and I'll pass the lantern to you."

That night we lay in the cavemouth, tight and warm in a single sleeping bag. A soft drizzle fell, obscuring the long, tumultuous view better than mere night could. My soul was sore and swollen, as if love for Alice were too large for the vessel made to contain it; and though flesh touched flesh all along our lengths, her eyes were far from me. I placed my lips upon the channel of her ear — the only method of speaking softly amid all these loud waters — and said (poetry failing me): "I love you so much it hurts."

"It shouldn't hurt," she said, "when I love you, too."

We made love more often during our days in the cave than I could count. Alice drew maps and explored the mountain, inside and out; I explored with her, and made frenzied poetry. It was not good — any of it — for it was propaganda only, against the cave, and, as I chanted it, I felt her drawing away from me. I was one raw nerve, all the time, increasingly desperate, as it became increasingly clear that Alice would not be dissuaded from squeezing herself into the mountain.

"No one has ever gone over the mountain before," I said. "Let's climb as far as our legs will carry us, and touch the spot where Earth and sky meet."

"I want to go under the atlas, not wrap around to the eastern edge."

"Doesn't the mountaintop deserve to be mapped?"

"It will mean more, once we understand what's underneath."

"But nothing is underneath!"

"Nothing has no voice to sing with."

"I don't believe we heard any singing at all."

At night, while she slept, peaceful with outdoor life and vigorous love, I lay awake, watching her face. The words rose about me, out of the water and the walls, and a straight soft light crept down the stream toward us. I lay in dread lest she would wake, for only inability to discover a safe method of lighting her way kept her outside that dreadful hole.

The song was like a bruise upon my ear. Alice heard it only when she cuddled the cold stone.

"... can't get under it..." she hummed, as she fried fish.

"Why are you so obsessed with that echo?" I snapped. "You'll have me hearing it next."

"But you do hear it! Don't lie to me, Lew."

"Why do you think I lie?"

"Do you think you could oppress yourself with falsehood to me, and me not know it? Besides, all your verses lately have had the rhythm. Why are you being so obstructive about this?"

"I'm not. I'm being sensible."

The day before the night the world closed in on me, she gave up trying to waterproof our lantern, and examined her options. "We'll have to go back and fetch something," I suggested.

"I suppose we must. They'll have something suitable in Willow Bluffs."

"But we'll have to restock, too. And hadn't you better file your maps and make a report? No sense risking them on two river journeys. We'd better go all the way home." Once I had her in the University, my mother and our friends would dissuade her from this fruitless obsession.

"Don't be silly. That would take forever."

"There's no hurry."

"What exactly is the matter with you?"

"Nothing!"

"Then why don't you want me to finish my thesis?"

"It *is* finished!"

"Not until I go through the wall and find what's there."

"*Nothing* is there!"

I had never seen contempt upon her face before. "You're afraid, aren't you?"

*Without her **body**, her voice was **eerie**, distorted and surrounded by a **halo** of echos.*

"No, I'm not!" But my face burned.

"Yes, you are! And so am I! You think I don't imagine what might happen to us, caught in a crack of the Earth drowning between stone and stone while those voices sing just out of reach?" A shudder ran through her, but her face shone. "Fear is a bad master. We must go and see."

"What good does it do anybody? Who cares?

"What good does poetry do anybody?"

For the first time we slept apart, that night: she, deep within the cave, where the walls began to narrow; I, near the mouth, where the wind that battered the rockface competed successfully with the myriad tormenting sounds of the cave. I stared into the night — open and perilous, as the space where the stream came through was closed and perilous. No place seemed safe now, not even Alice's arms. She did not love me, could not love me, and torture me so.

"... so wide, you can't ..."

I suppose the singing had been audible for some time before I noticed. It was the sight of my own low shadow, cast upon the rock, that made me aware that the light had come up. For a long time I resisted the impulse to turn over. Suddenly, panic struck — Alice was no more likely to sleep after such a fight than I. I leaped to my feet and saw her shape against the beam, carrying a pack. "Alice!"

Her silhouette hesitated, her arm beckoned. I splashed barefoot after her over the bruising stones. "Alice?"

"Hush!" Her voice held no more anger, only abstracted interest. "Don't you hear it now?"

I did not want to listen, but the voices were louder and more clear. Ahead of me, Alice's voice hummed and groped for words as my feet groped for purchase on the streambed.

"So high, you can't get over it ..."

I wanted to seize her, hold her til the light faded and left us alone in personal darkness. My chest crushed against my lungs. "Alice—" Even *I* did not hear me, as the echos of her clear voice ran away over the rocks.

"So low, you can't get under it —"

I could barely climb the waterfall for the trembling in my limbs, but she was swift and sure, and reached her hand to me. As she hoisted me onto the ledge, I looked her full in the face.

Dear God, why can't I remember her face?

"So wide, you can't get around it —"

The light came from the airspace. The water was transparent as air. I could have counted the gravel in the bed. "Where's your pack?" demanded Alice.

"Back at camp."

"Fetch it! Hurry! Who knows how long this will last?"

"All night," I said, recklessly, "like all the other nights. There's no hurry."

I could barely hear her voice over the soft racket of the cave. "Do you mean to tell me that this has happened every night since we've been here, and you never woke me?"

"That's true."

She turned away from me.

I took her arm. "Darling, don't you see how crazy this is? We can't go in there. We can't."

"I will. You can do as you like."

"You've got to go in at the door."

I should have been able to stop her. The current pushed against her as she shoved her pack through, lowered herself face-first into the water, and followed. I should have been stronger than she, the current and I between us should have held her; but she wiggled away — like an eel, like a dream — and finished the job with a well-placed boot that sent me back down the fall. Frantic, freezing, soaking wet, I clambered back up in the darkness as her body blocked the passage of the light.

"Alice!" I pounded on the rock face, screaming: "Alice! Come back!"

"So high, you can't get over it.
So low, you can't get under it.
So wide, you can't get around it.
You've got to go in at the door."

SOON THE LIGHT SHONE CLEAR AGAIN.

I tried to peer through, but it shone into my eyes, blinding me. I thought I heard her voice join the uncanny chorus. I thought that I must die. I thought that she must come out soon. My teeth chattered. I shivered violently. I suppose I cried. Certainly I called her til I was hoarse, til the light dimmed and the voices faded into the voices of water and rock.

How long did I wait? I was ill part of the time — stress, exposure, lack of sleep — inadequate diet, as well, as our food ran low and I lacked energy to find more. I tried to work, but everything I had written was garbage and my voice trembled even in writing. At last I burned all the paper but her maps and returned to the University.

The first thing I did was go to the Celestial Wing of the library. My verse was newly placed above the door, in a mosaic of mother of pearl, rose quartz, pyrite, agate, carnelian — I don't even remember. I found a hammer, and smashed it all before anyone could stop me.

I sit tonight in my father's study, watching her town melt into the rising night. Soon the lights among which she lived will mingle with the stars, and the Moon will grant the smooth, snowed prairies an illumination as false as my whole life.

All faces are ugly, all voices discordant, all colors too bright; and the joys we shared turn from me in scorn.

They think she is dead — my mother, our friends, the professors — but Alice can no more be dead, than I, without her, can be alive. It is my doing that she has not come out. Having left me, how could she return, until I came for her?

I did not think I heard her voice in that chorus much past the second day. I believe she has moved on. But moved on where?

So high, you can't get over it.

Five years ago, I sought her on the other side of the mountains, but found no trace of her. There must be some other place, which she is busy mapping — which we should have explored together. Is she happy without me, or have I condemned her to the same dreadful existence that I now suffer?

So low, you can't get under it.

I dream that she has been born into a world where years race by and life is frantic. In my dream, I follow, am born also — a child when she is grown. When I am old enough to claim her, she dies, and is born again, too young for me. So we pursue each other, endlessly, in a world I have skewed, where poetry is elusive, maps sketchy, and true love a constant battle against time and circumstances.

So wide, you can't get around it.

Not a hopeful dream; but anything is better than these ashes.

I must go in at the door. ❧

The echos created the illusion of a tune, elusive and distracting.

WHEN THE REAL AND THE SURREAL OVERLAP, HOW CAN A MAN FIND HIS BOUNDARIES?

THE INNER INNER CITY

"INVENT A RELIGION," JOHN CARVER SAID, AND for the first time I really took notice of him.

It wasn't the invitation. All of us in the group had been asked to do stranger things. It was the way he said it. I had pegged Carver for one of those affluent post-grads perfectly content to wile away a decade in a focusless quest for a Ph.D, one of the krill of the academic ocean. He would float until he was swallowed… by the final onus of a degree, or by an ambitious woman, or by his own aimlessness. In the meantime he was charming-enough company.

But he posed his challenge with an insouciance and an air of mischief that took me by surprise. He perched on the arm of the leather recliner and looked straight at me, though there were 15 of us crowded into the living room. He wore casually expensive clothes, perfectly cut jeans and a pastel sweatshirt, the sort whose

BY ROBERT CHARLES WILSON

Illustration by Jeff Potter

brand names I felt I was expected to recognize, though I never did. His face was lean and handsome. Not blandly handsome—aggressively handsome. He looked, not like a rapist, but like the sort of actor who would be cast as one.

Deirdre Frank peered at him through the watery lenses of her enormous eyeglasses. "What kind of religion? Any kind of religion?"

"A new religious doctrine," Carver said, "or dogma, article of faith, heresy, occultism, cosmology. Original in its elements. Submissions marked on a 10-point sliding scale, we all mark each other, and in the event of a tie I cast the deciding vote." All this was as usual. "Are we game?"

Someone had to go first. In this case it was Michelle, my wife. She opened the carved-basswood jewelry box we kept for the occasion and slipped a hundred dollar bill inside. "I'm in," she said. "But it's a toughie, John."

In the end we all anted up, even Chuck Byrnie, a tweedy atheist from the U. of T. chemistry department, though he grumbled before committing himself. "Somewhat unfair. More in Deirdre's line than mine."

Most of us were faculty. Deirdre was our chief exception. She had no credentials but an arts degree, class of '68, and a long perambulation through Toronto's evolving fringe cultures: Yorkville, Rochdale, Harbord Street, Queen Street. She owned the Golden Bough Gem and Crystal Shoppe, where Michelle worked part time. She was perhaps the paradigm of the aging hippie, gray-tressed and overweight, usually draped in a batik kaftan or some other wildly inappropriate ethnic garb. But she wasn't stupid and she wasn't afraid to match egos with the rest of us. "Stop whining, Chuck. Even the physicists are mystics nowadays."

"You've read Mary Baker Eddy. You have an advantage."

"Oh? And where would you guys be without Roger Bacon? Admit it—all you science types are closet alchemists."

Fifteen-hundred dollars in the kitty. Michelle locked the box in our safe, where it waited for a winner. Gatherings were held weekly, but the contest was quarterly. We had three months to play Christ, Buddha, Zoroaster. Winner take all.

The challenge sparked an evening's conversation, which was the purpose of it. What was religion, exactly, and where did you start? A new paganism or a new Christian heresy? Did UFOs count? ESP?

From these seeds would spring our ideas, and after tonight we wouldn't mention the subject again until the results were presented in November. It was our fifth year. The contest had started with a friendly wager between Michelle and a self-styled performance artist, something about whether Whitman was a better poet than Emerson. I had ended up refereeing the debate. Our Friday night social circle rendered final judgment, and we all enjoyed it so much (excepting the loser, who vanished soon thereafter) that we made it an institution, with rules. A Challenge, a Challenger, a hundred dollar ante, judgment by tribunal. Challenges had ranged from the whimsical (rewrite your favorite fairy tale in the style of William Faulkner) to the devilish (explain the theory of relativity using words of one syllable, points for clarity and brevity). Our best pots had topped $2,000.

John's challenge was... *interesting*, and I wondered what had prompted it. To my knowledge, he had never shown much interest in religion or the occult. I remembered him from my course on the Romantics, blithely amused but hardly fascinated. Something Byronesque about him, but without the doomed intensity; say, Byron on Zoloft. Tonight he was animated and engaging, and I wondered what else I had missed about him.

Sometime past midnight I stepped out onto the balcony for a breath of air. We had lived in this apartment for 10 years, Michelle and I. Central but a little north, 17 stories up, southern exposure. The city scrolled away from it like a vast and intricate diagram, as undecipherable as the language of the Hittites. Lights dim as stars cut into the black vastness of Lake Ontario, all quivering in the rising remains of the heat of the day. Here was a religion, I thought. Here was my religion. My secret book, my Talmud.

I had known this about myself for a long time, my addiction to the obscure beauties of the city. For most of my life I had consoled myself in its contradictions, its austerities, and its baroque recomplications. Here was the answer to Carver's challenge. I would make a city religion. An urban occultism. Divination by cartography. Call it *paracartography*.

Carver came through the sliding door as if I had summoned him. His presence broke the mood, but I was excited enough to describe my notion to him. He smiled one of his odd and distant smiles. "Sounds promising. A sort of map...."

"A *sacred* map," I said.

"Sacred. Exactly. Very clever, Jeremy. In fact, I — "

He would have said more, but Michelle barged onto the balcony to regale him with some idea of her own. She had been reading too many of Deirdre's New Age tracts, or simply drinking too much; she was flushed and semi-coherent, tugging Carver's sleeve as she talked, something about post-temporal deities, model worlds, gods from the end of time.

The party wound down around two. We gently hastened our last guest an hour later and went to bed without washing the dishes. Michelle was less feverish but still feeling the alcohol; she was impatient about making love. Drinking makes her eager, but I don't drink and have always found her occasional drunkenness an anti-aphrodisiac; her breath smelled like a chem lab and she looked at me as if she wasn't quite sure who had tumbled into bed with her.

But she was still fundamentally beautiful, still the brash and intelligent woman I had married a dozen years ago, and if our climaxes that night drew us deeper into ourselves and further from each other... well, here's a mystery I have never understood: ecstasy hates company.

ONE MORE THING I remember from that time. (And memory is the point of writing this.) We woke to breakfast among the ruins. Actually we took breakfast about 11, on the balcony, because the weather had turned lovely and cool, and the sun came slantwise between the bars of the railing and warmed our feet. Michelle mimed a hangover but said she actually felt OK, just a little rueful. Wide sheepish grin. We turned our faces to the breeze and sipped orange juice. We didn't talk about the contest, except this:

"Carver's interesting," she said. "Funny, I never really noticed him before."

"You noticed him last night."

"Well, that's the point. He used to be so quiet."

Did he? He struck me as evasive, mercurial—the whole idea of Carver had become suddenly slippery. I wondered aloud who had brought him to the group.

Michelle looked at me curiously. "You did, genius—last year sometime."

Was that possible? Carver had audited one of my classes—that was the first I saw of him—but afterward?

"A couple of meetings at Hart House," Michelle supplied. "He read your Coleridge book. Then you brought him to a Friday night and introduced him around. You said he was bright but a little withdrawn, sort of a lost puppy."

Funny thing to forget.

I LET THE CHALLENGE SLIDE for a month or so. By daylight, it lost some of its charm. Labour Day passed, classes resumed, and I was obliged to untangle the annual knotted shoestring of schedules and lectures, the endless autumn minutiae. In what began as a half-gesture toward the contest, I took up walking again.

Not that I had ever completely abandoned it. By "walking" I mean long, late walks—walks without destination, often after midnight, sometimes until dawn. Compulsive as much as therapeutic. I lived in one of the few cities in North America where such urban walking was less than mortally dangerous, and I had

learned which places to avoid—the after-hours clubs, the hustlers' alleys, the needle parks.

Of course, this kind of wandering constitutes suspicious behavior. Cops are apt to stop you and read your ID into their dashboard data banks. Young male steroid abusers from the suburbs on a gay-bashing soiree might turn their attention your way. Some years ago a belligerent drunk had broken my jaw, for reasons known only to himself.

I think even Michelle wondered about these expeditions at first. I wouldn't have been the first dutiful husband with a secret career in the midnight toilet stalls. But that wasn't it. The only solace I wanted or needed was the solace of an empty street. It clears the mind and comforts the soul.

At least, it used to.

Walking took my mind off my work and turned it back toward Carver's challenge. I was neither religious nor dogmatically atheistic—I had shelved all those issues in a category marked "Unanswerable Questions," after which what more was there to say? I had been raised in a benign Anglicanism and had shed it without trauma. But I wasn't empty of the religious impulse. It's no secret that my fascination with the Romantic poets was equally a fascination with their opiated gnosticism, their sense of an *aeternitas* haunting every crag and glen.

What is perhaps strange is that the city gave me the same sensation. We contrast the urban and the natural, but that's a contemporary myth; we're animals, after all; our cities are organic products, fully as natural as a termite hill or a rabbit warren. But how much more interesting: how much more complex, dressed in the intricacies and strange exfoliations of human culture, simple patterns iterated into infinite variation. And full of secrets, secrets beyond counting.

I think I had always known this. When I was seven years old and allowed to stay up to see *The Naked City* (intrigued even then by the title), it wasn't the melodrama that drew me but the opportunity to hear the opening credits, the ABC announcer's lugubrious "There are a million stories in the Naked City," which I understood as a great and terrible truth.

Obviously my religion of the city would have to unite the two, the gnostic impulse and the urban mandala. Paracartography implied the making of maps, city maps, a map of this city, but not an ordinary map; it must be a map of the city's secret terrains, the city as perceived by a divine madman, streets rendered as ecstasies or purgatories; a map legible only at night, in the dark.

Too complex and senseless a piece of work, even with $1500 at stake, but I couldn't dismiss it, and wondered if some hint of the idea might be enough to take the pot.

I thought about it as I walked—one night a week, sometimes two, rarely three. I carried a notebook in case of inspiration. Paracartography became one of those ideas so paradoxical and odd as to inspire a strange fascination. I found it was always in the back of my mind, waiting for a free hour or a tedious subway ride or, best of all, an evening's walk.

And yet the walks were still their own reward. Even after almost a quarter-century of restless exploration, there were still neighborhoods and terrains that took me absolutely by surprise, and surprise was the purpose and reward of the exercise: to come around a corner and find some black and shadowed warehouse, some abandoned railway siding, a hidden angle of moonlight on a crumbling silo that catches the heart with an inexplicable poignancy.

What I rediscovered that autumn was my ability to get lost. Toronto is a forgiving city, essentially a gridwork of streets as formal and uninspiring as its banks. Walk in any direction long enough, you'll find a landmark or a familiar bus route. As a rule. But the invention of paracartography exercised such trancelike power that I was liable to walk without any sense of time or direction and find myself, hours later, in a wholly new neighborhood, as if my unattended feet had followed a map of their own.

Which was precisely what I wanted. Automatic pathfinding, like automatic writing. How better to begin a paracartographic survey?

The only trouble was that I began to look a little ragged at work. Friends inquired about my health. I didn't feel the sleep deprivation, but I began to use drops to disguise the inevitable red-eye. My best friends worried more than I thought appropriate.

One afternoon early in October, I phoned Michelle to tell her I'd be late, took transit to the Dundas subway station, transferred to a streetcar, and rode it east until I felt like getting off. Heady, that first moment of freedom. The air was crisp, the sun was about to set on the other side of the Don River Valley. I remember a cheap meal, curry and chapatis at a Pakistani diner while I watched the traffic through a cracked and steam-fogged window. Then out again into the fresh night. I walked west, where the wind-scrubbed sky was still faintly blue.

I remember the first evening star over the Armoury; I remember amber streetlights reflected in the barred and dusty windows of Church Street pawnshops, I remember the sound of my own footsteps ticking on empty sidewalks....

But memory falters (more often now), and apart from a general sensation of cold and uncertainty, the next thing I remember is finding myself in full daylight about a half-block from Deirdre's gem shop.

According to my watch it was after 10, a sunny Saturday morning. There was no place I had to be. But Michelle might be worried. I stopped by the shop to use the phone.

Deirdre was at the back, hanging dream-catchers from the pegboard ceiling. Kathy, her other part-timer, lounged behind the counter looking impatient. "Morning, Dr. Singer," she trilled.

Deirdre looked down from her stepladder. "Hey, Jeremy. Geeze, look at you. Been eroding the shoe leather again?"

"It shows?"

"Sort of a Bataan Death-March look...."

"Tactful as ever. Mind if I call Michelle?"

"My guest."

Michelle was relieved to hear from me, said she hadn't been worried but would I be home for lunch? I told her I would and put the phone back under the counter.

"Don't sneak off," Deirdre said. "Kathy can mind the store a while. Buy me coffee."

I said I could spare half an hour.

She stopped at a hardware store across the street and bought a box of houseplant fertilizer. "For the ladies?" I asked.

"The ladies."

Deirdre's "ladies" were the female marijuana plants she grew in her basement. If Deirdre trusted you, she'd tell you about her garden. I had seen it once, a fragrant emerald oasis tucked into a closet and illuminated with a football-sized halide bulb. She grew cannabis for her own use and to my knowledge never sold any, though Deirdre was so customarily level-headed and so seldom publicly stoned that I wondered what exactly she used it for. She was a pothead but not a social pothead; she kept her intoxications to herself.

We bought coffee at the Second Cup and found a window table. Deirdre gulped half her latte and frowned critically at me. "You really do look like shit, Jeremy. And you don't smell much better."

Half-moons of sweat under my arms. I was aware of my own stink, the low-tide smell of too much exercise on a cold night. My thighs ached and my feet were throbbing. I admitted I might have overdone it a little.

"So where'd you go?"

"Started out across the Don, ended up here."

"That's not an all-night walk."

"I took the scenic route."

"And saw—?"

I realized I didn't have an answer. An image flitted past my mind's eye, of a gray street, gray flagstone storefronts, shuttered second-

story windows, but the memory was sepia-toned, faded, fading. "Shadows on a cavern wall."

"What?"

"Plato."

"You're so fucked up sometimes." She paused. "Listen, Jeremy, is everything OK between you and Michelle?"

"Me and Michelle? Why do you ask?"

"That's an evasion. Why do I ask? I ask because I'm a nosy old lady who can't mind her own business. Also because I'm your friend."

"Has she said something?"

"No. Nothing at all. It's just—"

"Just what?"

She drummed her fingers on the table. "If I say it's a hunch, that doesn't cut much ice, huh?"

"If it's a hunch, Deirdre, I'd say thanks for thinking of us, but your hunch is wrong. We're fine."

"There's something that happens to married people. They lose track of each other. Everything's routine, you know, dinner and TV and bed, but meanwhile they're sailing separate boats, spiritually I mean. Until one of 'em wakes up in an empty bed going, 'What the fuck?'"

"Thank you, Dr. Ruth."

"Well, OK." The last half of her coffee chased the first. "Are you writing another book?"

"What?"

"That little notepad sticking out of your pocket. And your pen's starting to leak, there, Jeremy."

I grabbed the ballpoint out of my pocket, but the shirt was going to be a casualty. As for the notebook, I began to tell Deirdre how I kept it around for inspiration regarding the Challenge, but it was empty so far… except it wasn't empty.

"Good part of a book right there," Deirdre said, watching me flip through the pages.

Every page was filled. The handwriting was tiny and cramped, but it looked like my own.

Only one problem. I couldn't read a word.

HERE THE QUESTION BECOMES: Why didn't I see a doctor?

It wouldn't have helped, of course, but I didn't know that then. And I had read enough Oliver Sacks to realize that the combination of periodic fugues and graphomania spelled big trouble, at least potentially.

Nor was I afraid of doctors. In my 41 years I had made it through an appendectomy, a kidney stone, and two impacted wisdom teeth. No big deal.

Of course a brain tumor *would* have been a big deal, but the idea of talking to a doctor didn't even occur to me; it was beyond the pale, unnecessary, absurd. What had happened was not a medical but a *metaphysical* mystery. I think it half-delighted me.

And half-terrified me, but the terror was metaphysical too: If this new discontinuity was not imaginary then it must be external, which implied that I had crossed a real boundary, that I had stepped at least a little distance into the land beyond the mirror.

In short, I didn't think about it rationally.

But I did think about it. Come November, I thought about it almost constantly.

The details of a descent into obsession are familiar enough. I came to believe in my own psychological invulnerability even as friends began to ask delicately whether I might not want to "see someone." I let my work slide. Missed a few lectures. I told myself I was achieving a valuable insight into the Romantic sensibility, and I suppose that was true, in a twisted sense; Novalis's sad hero forever seeking his blue flower could hardly have been more single-minded. Single-mindedly, I began to assemble my map.

I won't tell you how I did it. In any case there was no single method, only materials and intuition. I will say that I obtained the largest and most comprehensive survey map of the city I could find, and then began to distort and overlay it according to my own perceptions, certain that each new palimpsest of ink and color, each new Mylar transparency, was not obscuring but actually revealing the city—the occult, the *hidden* city.

I kept the work private, but we all did, in a Challenge; even Michelle and I were competing for that $1500 (though the money was the least of my considerations). She didn't mention temporal deities to me. And although she knew something had gone awry—for one thing, our sex life suffered—she said very little. Humoring me, I thought. The good and faithful wife. But she didn't have to speak; I read a volume of recrimination in her frowns and silences, and there were moments when I hated her for it.

"YOU REALIZE," DEIRDRE SAID, "HE'S FUCKING US OVER."

November had come in on the last breath of autumn, sunny and warm. Deirdre had shown up early for our Friday night, the night we judged the Challenge. Michelle was busy in the kitchen. I sat with Deirdre on the balcony, the fragile heat of the day evaporating fast.

Deirdre wore XL denim bib overalls and a baseball cap turned sideways. She took a joint from the grimy depths of her purse and held it up. "Mind?"

"Not at all."

She hunted for a lighter. "We don't even know who he is—where he comes from."

She was talking about John Carver. "He's been shy about his past, true."

"He's not shy about anything, Jeremy. Haven't you figured that out? If there's something he hasn't told us, it's 'cause he doesn't want us to know."

"That's a little harsh."

"Watch him tonight. He's the center of attention. We huddle at his feet like he's Socrates or someone, and people forget it wasn't always like that. Better yet, keep your eyes off Carver and look at the crowd. It's like hypnotism, what he does. He radiates this power, this very deliberate sexual thing, and it *pins* people. I mean, they don't blink!"

"He's charismatic."

"I guess so. Up to a point. I don't get it, myself. And he does not welcome criticism, our Mr. Carver."

"He doesn't?"

She lit the joint and exhaled a wisp of piney smoke. "Try it and see."

IF I HAD BEEN LESS CONCERNED with my map I might have paid Deirdre closer attention. But I was nervous. Now that the map was about to become public it began to seem doomed, chimerical, stupid. I considered forfeiting the prize money and keeping my obsession to myself.

More guests arrived. The group was slightly diminished lately. A few regulars had stopped showing up. There were seven of us present when we took up the Challenge.

Each participant was allotted 10 minutes in which to convince the others he or she deserved the prize. Showmanship counted. The contest was graded pointwise and we were scrupulously fair; it benefited no one to deliberately mark down the competition—and we were honorable people, even with $1500 at stake.

I forget who went first. Some ideas were novel, some half-hearted. Ellie Cochrane, one of Chuck Byrnie's students, proposed a sort of techno-divination, reading the future in blank-channel TV noise. Ted Fishbeinder, an Arts Department teaching assistant, did a funny riff on "esthetic precognition" in which, for instance, the Surrealist movement represented a "psychic plagiarism" of contemporary rock videos.

Then it was Michelle's turn.

She used more than her allotted time, but nobody said a word. We were astonished. Myself most of all. Michelle wasn't much of a public speaker, and her part in previous Challenges had always been low-key—but this Challenge was different.

She spoke with a steady, articulate passion, and her eyes were fixed on Carver throughout.

Suppose, she said—and this is the best recollection I can muster—suppose that sentient creatures become their own God. That is, suppose God is human intellect at the end of time, a kind of teleological white hole in which consciousness engulfs the universe that created it. And suppose, furthermore, that the flow of time is not unidirectional. Information may be extracted from the past, or the past recreated in the body of God. Might not our freshly created supreme being (or beings) reach back into human history and commit miracles?

But take it another step, Michelle said: Suppose the teleological gods want to recreate history in miniature, to re-run each consecutive moment of universal history as a sort of goldfish bowl at the end of the universe.

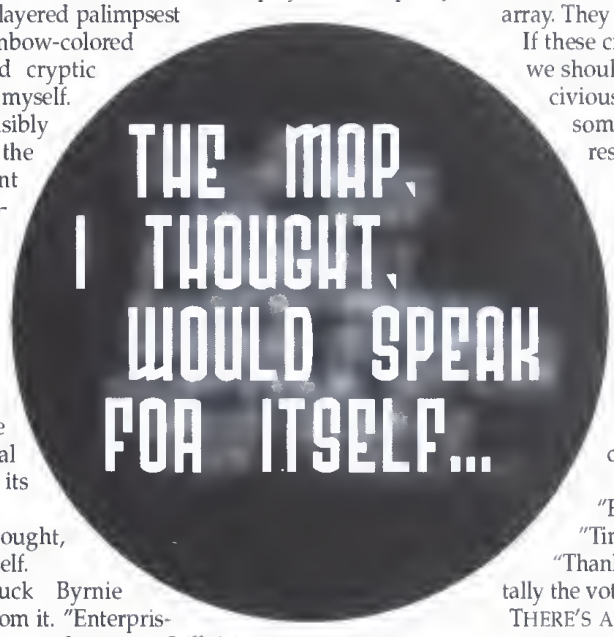
Would we know, if we were such a simulation? Probably not... but there might be clues, Michelle said, and she enumerated a few. (Physics, she said, asks us to believe in a discontinuous quantum-level universe that actually makes more sense if interpreted as information—a "digital" universe, hence infinitely simulatable... or already a simulation!)

And there was much more, speculation on teleological entities, the multiple nature of God, wars in heaven—but memory fails.

I do remember John Carver returning her stare, and the silent communication that seemed to pass between them. Mentor and student, I thought. Maybe he'd helped her with this.

When she finished, we all took a deep breath. Chuck Byrnie murmured, "We seem to have a winner." There was scattered applause.

It was a tough act to follow. I let Michelle dash to the kitchen before I screwed up my courage and brought out the map—poor feeble thing it now seemed. A round of drinks, then the crowd gathered. I stumbled through an explanation of paracartography that sounded incoherent even to me, and then I displayed the map—by this time a thickly layered palimpsest of acetate and rainbow-colored acrylic paints and cryptic keys legible only to myself. Nobody reacted visibly to it, but for me the map was a silent reassurance, pleasant to stand next to, like a fire on a cold night. Maybe no one else sensed its power, but I did—I felt the promise of its unfollowed and hidden avenues, the scrolls of spiritual code concealed in its deeps.



The map, I thought, would speak for itself.

Eventually Chuck Byrnie averted his eyes from it. "Enterprising," he said. "More art than map. Still, it's quite wonderful, Jeremy. You should be proud. But why is it empty at the center?"

"Eh?" The question took me by surprise.

"I mean to say, why is it blank in the middle? I can see how it bears a certain relationship to the city, and those arteries or veins, there, might be streets... but it seems odd, to have left such a hole in the middle."

No one objected. Everybody seemed to think this was a reasonable question.

I stared at the map. Squinted at the map. But try as I might, I couldn't see "a blank in the middle." The map was continuous, a single seamless thing.

I felt suddenly queasy. Byrnie waited for an answer, frowning.

"*Terra incognita*," I said breathlessly. "Here there be tygers, Chuck."

"I see."

I didn't.

DEIRDRE WAS THE LAST CONTESTANT, and we were all a little tired. Midnight passed. Michelle had brought out the basswood box, and it rested on the coffee table waiting for a winner—but it had ceased to be the centerpiece of the evening.

Chuck Byrnie yawned.

Deirdre wouldn't win the prize, and I think we all knew it. But this wasn't only *pro forma*. *Watch Carver*, she had said. And I did: I watched Carver watch Deirdre. He watched her fiercely. No one else seemed to notice (and I know the obvious is often invisible), but the expression on his face looked like hatred, hatred pure as distilled vitriol. For a moment I had the terrifying feeling that an animal was loose in the room, something subtle and vicious and quick.

Deirdre said, "I think we should reconsider the history of divine intervention."

She looked frail, I thought, for all her 20 or 30 excess pounds, her apparent solidity. Her eyes were bright, nervous. She looked like prey.

Every culture, she said, has a folk tradition of alien visitations. Think of Pan, the Sidhe, Conan Doyle's fairies, Terence McKenna's "machine elves," or any of the thousands of North American men and women who fervently and passionately believe they've been abducted by almond-eyed space creatures.

It isn't a pretty history, Deirdre said. Look at it dispassionately. Much as we might want to believe in benign or enlightened spirits, what do these creatures do? Kidnap people, rape women, mutilate cattle, substitute changelings for human infants, cast lives into disarray. They mislead; they torture.

If these creatures are not wholly imaginary, Deirdre said, then we should regard them as dangerous. Also sadistic, petty, lascivious, and very powerful. However seductive they might sometimes seem, they're clearly hostile and ought to be resisted in any way possible.

Carver said, "That seems a little glib. What do you suppose these creatures want from us? What's in it for them, Deirdre?"

"I can't imagine. Maybe they're Michelle's 'temporal deities' —half-gods, with the kind of mentality that delights in picking wings off flies. There's a sexual component in most of these stories. Sex and cruelty."

"They sound more human than divine."

"I think we're a playground for them. They inhabit a much larger world—we're an anthill, as far as they're concerned."

"But why the hatred?"

"Even an ant can bite."

"Time's up," Chuck Byrnie said.

"Thank you, Deirdre," John Carver said. "Very insightful. Let's tally the votes."

THERE'S A CITY INSIDE THE CITY—THE CITY AT THE CENTER OF THE MAP.

I couldn't see the hole in the map because for me there was no hole: The gap closed when I looked at it, or else the most important part of the map was invisible to anyone but myself.

And that made sense. What I had failed to understand was that paracartography must necessarily be a private matter. My map isn't your map. The ideal paracartographical map charts not a territory but a mind, or at least it merges the two: the inner inner city.

Michelle took the prize. She seemed less pleased with the money than with John Carver's obvious approval.

Deirdre took me aside as the evening ended. "Jeremy."

"Mm?"

"Are you blind or just stupid?"

"Do I get another choice?"

"I'm serious." She sighed. "There's something in you, Jeremy, something a little lost and obsessive, and he found that—he dug it out of you like digging a stone out of the ground. He used it, and he's still using it. It amuses him to watch us screw around with these scary ideas like little kids playing with blasting caps."

"Deirdre, I don't need a lecture."

"What you need is a wake-up call. Ah, hell, Jeremy .... This is not the kind of news I love to deliver, but it's obvious she's sleeping with him. Please think about it."

I stared at her. Then I said, "Time to leave, Deirdre."

"It matters to me what happens to you guys."

"Just go."

MICHELLE WENT WORDLESSLY TO BED.

I couldn't sleep.

I sat on the balcony under a duvet, watching the city. At half-past three, the peak (or valley) of the night, I thought I saw the city itself in all its luminous grids begin subtly to shift—to move, somehow, without moving; to part and make a passage where none had been.

I closed my aching eyes and went inside. The map was waiting.

MY DEPARTMENT HEAD SUGGESTED A SABBATICAL. SHE ALSO SUGgested I consult a mental-health specialist. I took the time off, gratefully. It was convenient to be able to sleep during the day.

THERE IS A CITY INSIDE THE CITY, but the road there is tortuous and strange.

I glimpsed that city for the first time in December, late on a cold night.

I was tired. I'd come a long way. The lost city was not, at first sight, distinctly different. It possessed, if anything, a haunting familiarity, and only gradually did I wake to its strangeness and charm.

I found myself on an empty street of two- and three-story brick buildings. The buildings looked as if they might have been built at the turn of the last century, though the capstones had no dates. The brick was gray and ancient, the upper-story windows shuttered and dark. Remnants of Depression-era advertising clung to the walls like scabs.

The storefronts weren't barred, though cracks laced the window glass. The goods dimly visible behind the panes were generic, neglected, carelessly heaped together: pyramids of patent leather shoes or racks of paperback books in various languages. The businesses were marginal—tobacco shops, junk shops, shops that sold back-issue magazines or canned food without labels. Their tattered awnings rattled in the wind.

It sounds dreary, but it wasn't, at least not to my eyes; it was a small magic, this inexplicable neighborhood glazed with December moonlight, chill and perfect as a black pearl. It should not have existed. *Didn't* exist. I couldn't place it in any customary part of the city nor could I discern any obvious landmarks (the CN Tower, the bank buildings). Streets here parted and met again like the meanders of a slow river, and the horizon was perpetually hidden.

The only light brighter than the winter moon came from an all-hours coffee shop at a corner bereft of street signs. The air inside was moist but still cold. Two men in dowdy overcoats sat huddled over a faded Formica tabletop. Behind the cash counter, a middle-aged woman in a hairnet looked at me blankly.

"Coffee," I said, and she poured a cup, and I took it. It didn't occur to me to pay, and she didn't ask.

Things work differently at the heart of the heart of the city.

And yet it was familiar. It ached with memory. I'd been here before, I knew, at some time outside the discourse of history.

I took my notebook from my jacket pocket. Maybe this was where I had invented my ideoglyphs, or where the invisible city had generated them, somehow, itself. I flipped open the notepad and was only mildly surprised to find the words suddenly, crisply, legible. This did not astonish me—I was past that—but I read the contents with close attention.

Every page was a love letter. Concise, nostalgic, sad, sincere, my own. And every page was addressed to Michelle.

FINDING MY WAY HOME WAS DIFFICULT. The hidden city encloses itself. There are no parallel lines in the hidden city. Streets cross themselves at false intersections. There are, I think, many identical streets, the peeling Edwardian town houses and bare maples deceptively iterated, unnavigable. I don't know how long it took to find my way back, nor could I say just where the border lay or when I passed it, but by dawn I found myself on a pedestrian bridge where the railway tracks run south from Dundas, among the wind-haunted warehouses and empty coal-dust factories of the city as it should be.

I checked my pocket, but the notebook was gone.

MOST OF THE UNIVERSE IS INVISIBLE—INVISIBLE IN THE SENSE OF unseen, unexperienced. The deserts of Mars, the barrens of Mercury, the surfaces of a million unnamed planets, places where time passes, where a rock might tumble from a cliffside or a glacier calve into a lifeless sea, invisibly. Did you walk to work today, or take a walk after dinner? Everyday things become or remain invisible: the mailbox you passed (where is it exactly?), the crack in the sidewalk, the sign in the window, this morning's breakfast.

I think I didn't see Michelle. I think I hadn't seen her for a long time.

Have I described her? I would, but I can't. What memory loses is rendered invisible; it merges into the seas and deserts of the unseen universe.

I'm writing this for her. For you.

MICHELLE WASN'T HOME when I looked for her. That might have been normal or it might not. I had lost track of the days of the week. I went to look for her at Deirdre's store.

Winter now, skies like blue lead, a brisk and painful wind. The wind ran in fitful rivers down Bay Street and lifted scrap newspapers high above gold-mirrored windows.

The store was closed, but I saw Deirdre moving in the dim space inside. She unlocked the door when I tapped.

"You look—" she said.

"Like shit. I know. You don't look too good yourself, Deirdre."

She looked, in fact, frightened and sleepless.

"I think he's after me, Jeremy."

"Who, Carver?"

"Of course Carver."

She pulled me inside and closed the door. Wind rattled the glass. The herbal reek of the store was overpowering.

Deirdre unfolded a director's chair for me, and we sat in the prism light of her window crystals. "I followed him," she said.

"You did what?"

"Does that surprise you? Of course I followed him. I thought it was about time we knew something about John Carver, since he seems to know more than enough about us. Did he ever tell you where he lives?"

"He must have."

"You remember what he said?"

"No...."

"No one remembers. Or else it didn't occur to them to ask. Don't you find that a little odd?"

"Maybe a little."

"Turns out he lives in the Beaches, out near the water-treatment plant. Here, I'll write down the address for you."

"That's not necessary."

"The fuck it's not necessary. Information about John Carver has this interesting way of disappearing."

"I came here to ask you about Michelle."

"I know."

She scrawled the address on the back of a register receipt. "And Jeremy, one more thing."

"What?"

"Be careful of him. He's not human."

Don't be ridiculous, I began to say, but the words stuck. In the realm of what was possible and what was not, I seemed to have lost all compass. "Do you really believe that?"

"I've spent a lot of time reading the strange books, Jeremy, and talking to the strange people. It's hard to believe in hidden information in the information age, but there are still some mysteries that haven't made the Internet. Trust me on this."

"What should I do?"

She looked away, ashamed of her impotence. "I don't know."

LONG STORY SHORT: I WENT HOME, MICHELLE HADN'T SHOWN UP, nor did she come home that night.

I didn't sleep. I watched TV, and when that was finished I watched the seconds hand sweep around the face of Michelle's bedroom clock. Michelle didn't believe in digital clocks—hated them. The only digital clock in the apartment was the one on my wrist. She believed in the tick and sweep of old-fashioned time.

I fell asleep at dawn and woke to find the daylight already fading, snow on the windowsill, snow falling in sheets and ribbons over the city. No Michelle.

I tried phoning Deirdre. There was no answer at the store or at her home number.

Then I remembered the address she had scrawled for me—John Carver's address.

I was in my jacket and headed for the door when the phone rang.

"Jeremy?"

Deirdre, and she sounded breathless. "Where are you?"

"Doesn't matter. Jeremy, don't try to get hold of me after this."

"Why not?"

"They busted my garden! Raided the store, too—on principle, I guess."

"The police?"

"It wasn't the fucking Girl Guides!"

"You're in custody?"

"Hell no. I was having lunch with Chuck Byrnie when it happened. Kathy managed to warn me off." She paused. "I guess I'm a wanted criminal. I don't know what they do to you for growing grass anymore. Jail or a fine or what. But they trashed my house, Jeremy, and my place of business, and I can't afford legal fees." She sounded near tears.

"You can stay here," I said.

"No, I can't. The thing is, only half a dozen people knew about the garden. Somebody must have tipped the police."

"I swear I never—"

"Not you, asshole!"

"Carver?"

"I never told him about the plants. Somebody else must have."

The wind scoured grains of snow against the balcony door, a sandpaper sound.

"You're saying Michelle—"

"I'm not pissed at Michelle. It comes down to John Carver, and that's why I called. He means business, and he isn't pleased with me—or you."

"You can't be sure of that."

"I can't be sure of anything. I think he's been manipulating us from the word go."

"Deirdre—"

"My advice? Throw that fucking map away. And good luck, Jeremy."

"How can I reach you?"

"You can't. But thanks."

TIME PASSES DIFFERENTLY IN THE SECRET CITY. DAY FOLLOWS NIGHT, sunlight sweeps the sundial streets, seasons pass, but the past eats itself and the future is the present, only less so. We pace the sidewalks, we few citizens of this underpopulated city, empty of appetite, wordless, but how many others are keeping secret diaries? Or keeping the same diary endlessly reiterated, all stories worn smooth with the telling.

I took a last look at the map. The map was mounted on a pressboard frame leaning against the wall of my study.

The map was sleek, seductive, inexpressibly beautiful, but I didn't need it any longer. It had never been more than a tool. I didn't need the map because I contained it—I was the map, in some sense; and it would be dangerous, I thought, to leave so potent a self-portrait where strangers might find it.

So I destroyed it. I carved it into pieces, like a penitent debtor destroying a credit card, and then I pushed the pieces down the garbage chute.

Then I went to look for Michelle.

WHAT MICHELLE HADN'T SAID, what Michelle hadn't guessed, and Deirdre hadn't figured out, was that a temporal deity, even a minor and malevolent one, must have all the maps, all the ordinary and the hidden maps, all the blueprints and bibles and Baedekers of all the places there are or might be or have ever been.

I took the Queen car east. The scrap of paper on which Deirdre had written Carver's address was in my pocket—more out than in, really, since I felt compelled to check it and check it again as the streetcar stuttered past the racetrack, the waterworks. The numbers were elusive.

The address was well off the transit routes. What I found when I approached on foot was an ordinary Beaches neighborhood, snow-silent and still. The houses were fashionable restored freeholds above the frozen lakeshore, a few lights still burning in second- and third-story bedroom windows. Carver's was no different. I wondered whether he owned it or rented, whether money had ever been a problem for him. I doubted it.

And now what? Should I knock on the door and demand to see Michelle? What if she wasn't there—what if Deirdre and I had drawn all the wrong conclusions? I stood in the snow and felt useless and foolish.

Then—I presume not coincidentally—Carver's door opened, and I stepped behind a snowbound hedge as he came smiling into the night.

Michelle was on his arm.

She wore her navy winter coat with the collar turned up. She looked cold and bewildered, both very young and very old. Carver wore jeans and a flannel shirt, and the snow seemed not to touch him.

I blinked—and they were at the end of the block.

I called Michelle's name. She didn't look back—only inclined her head, as if an errant thought had troubled her.

There was nothing to do but follow them.

HE TURNED CORNERS I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE. NARROW ALLEYS, a corridor of trees in an empty park, a wood-paved ravine walk dense with swirling snow.

I ran, they strolled, but the gap between us widened until Michelle was a distant figure, vague among the snow-spirals, and Carver—

Carver, I believe, began to grow translucent, not-quite-invisible, became a gap in the falling snow that might have been a human shape or something taller, more agile, sleek, potent, pleased.

Continued on page 80

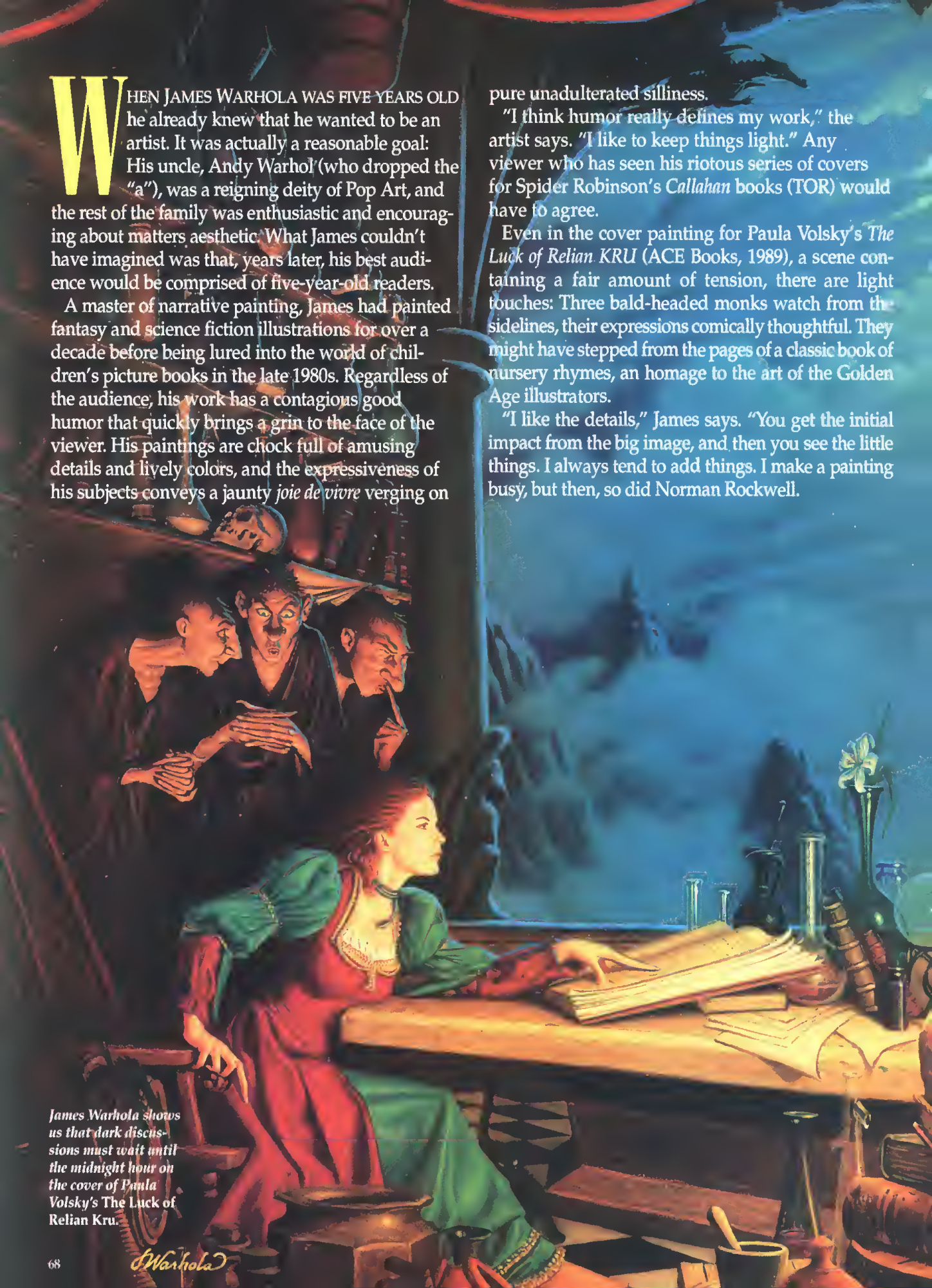
WHEN JAMES WARHOLA WAS FIVE YEARS OLD he already knew that he wanted to be an artist. It was actually a reasonable goal: His uncle, Andy Warhol (who dropped the "a"), was a reigning deity of Pop Art, and the rest of the family was enthusiastic and encouraging about matters aesthetic. What James couldn't have imagined was that, years later, his best audience would be comprised of five-year-old readers.

A master of narrative painting, James had painted fantasy and science fiction illustrations for over a decade before being lured into the world of children's picture books in the late 1980s. Regardless of the audience, his work has a contagious good humor that quickly brings a grin to the face of the viewer. His paintings are chock full of amusing details and lively colors, and the expressiveness of his subjects conveys a jaunty *joie de vivre* verging on pure unadulterated silliness.

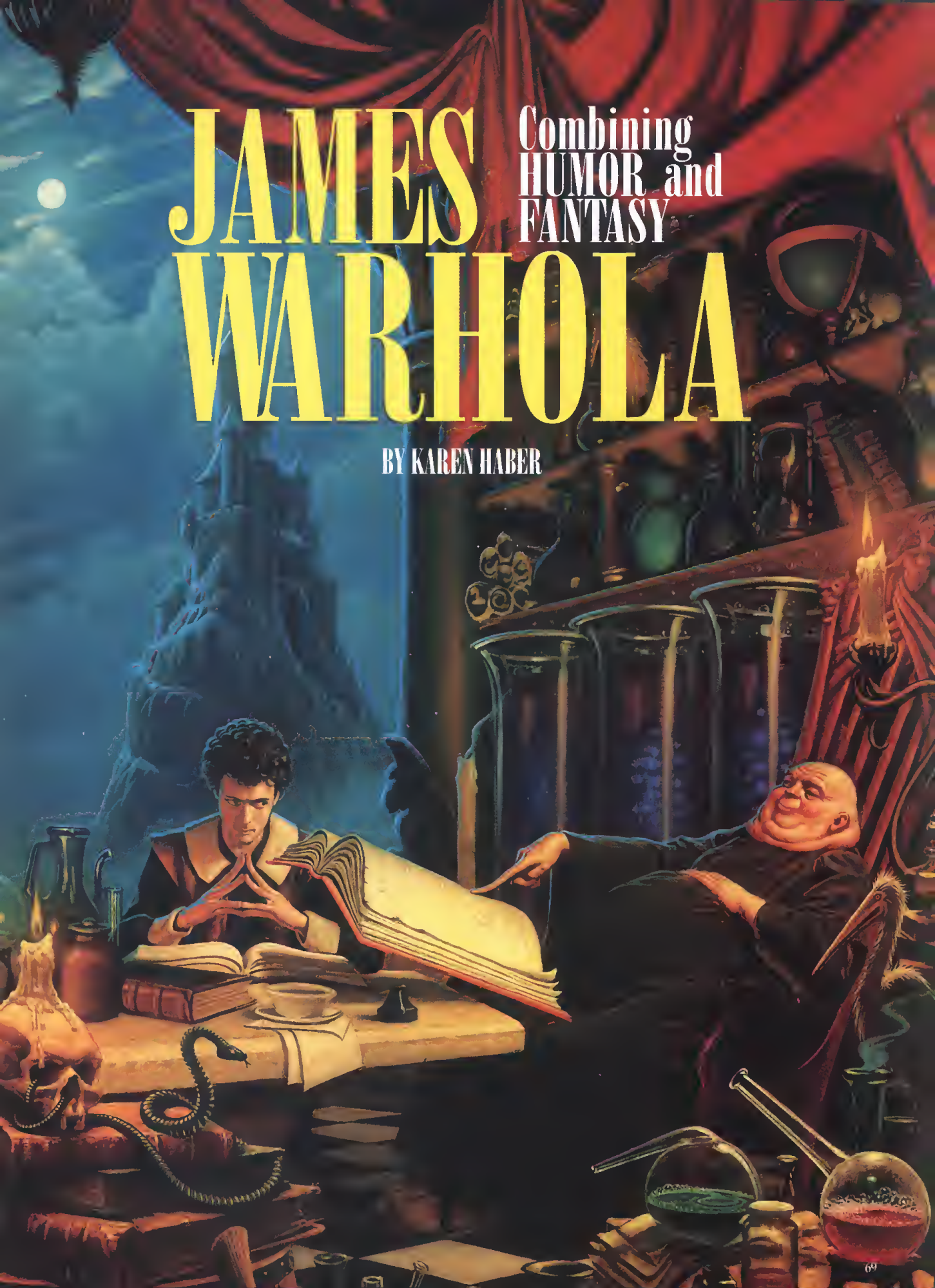
"I think humor really defines my work," the artist says. "I like to keep things light." Any viewer who has seen his riotous series of covers for Spider Robinson's *Callahan* books (TOR) would have to agree.

Even in the cover painting for Paula Volsky's *The Luck of Relian KRU* (ACE Books, 1989), a scene containing a fair amount of tension, there are light touches: Three bald-headed monks watch from the sidelines, their expressions comically thoughtful. They might have stepped from the pages of a classic book of nursery rhymes, an homage to the art of the Golden Age illustrators.

"I like the details," James says. "You get the initial impact from the big image, and then you see the little things. I always tend to add things. I make a painting busy, but then, so did Norman Rockwell.



James Warhola shows us that dark discussions must wait until the midnight hour on the cover of Paula Volsky's The Luck of Relian Kru.



JAMES WARHOLA

Combining HUMOR and FANTASY

BY KAREN HABER

RIGHT: Warhola's cover for The Obelisk, *by Ron Goulart, entertains us with the notion that not all bats are harmless. BELOW: Despite grim circumstances, this glass encased prisoner remains a true gentleman in James Blaylock's* Humongulous. *OPPOSITE: Warhola enjoys oils because of their forgiving nature and lustrous color effects as depicted in* The Alchemist.

"In style I tend to be realistic although I like exaggeration and I'm getting more into that. I've loosened up a little and allowed myself to make things look less realistic."

His early influences were primarily visual: movies, comic books, and the work of his uncle. "My dear uncle Andy always encouraged me in my artwork," James recalls. "He was especially fond of comic book art, science fiction, and fantasy. And whenever I visited him he always sent me home with a load of art supplies, stuff he had lying around the studio. He helped me learn how to do certain little things. All the way up through school he was always really interested in what I was doing. And his success was one of the things that allowed my parents to be very open to my getting involved in art."

However encouraging James found Uncle Andy's attention, he credits his father, Paul, eldest brother of Andy, as his greatest influence. "My father has a very artistic way of seeing the world—he was always talking art and was really creative in his concepts. And he—and Andy—got it from their mother, looking at the world in a different way. Now that he's retired, my dad's painting and making prints. And he still inspires me."

Other inspiration came from Golden Age illustrators Howard Pyle, Andrew Wyeth, Norman Rockwell, French Academic painters Leon Gerome and William Adolphe Bouguereau, and Arts Nouveau masters Alphonse Mucha and Gustav Klimt.

BORN IN PITTSBURGH, PENN., James began drawing almost as soon as he could hold a pencil. His artistic ability was noticed early on: James treasures a note from his first-grade teacher telling him to pursue his artistic destiny. However, he wants it made clear that he was not a prodigy. "I didn't think of myself as being an outstanding artist at an early age. Though I started early I grew very slowly. My success as an artist has more to do with persistence and diligence and, of course, a lot of encouragement from family."

Part of that encouragement came as a result of l-o-o-o-ng bus rides to the Phil Seuling Comic Art Conventions in New York City, accompanied by his pal, Bill G. Wilson, in 1968 when James was 13. It was there that he first encountered the work of Frank Frazetta, Jeff Jones, and others. "It was when I first saw Jeff Jones's cover paintings—brushy, beautifully designed—that I started to realize that, even more than comics, I wanted to do figurative oil paintings."

He attended Saturday art classes at the Carnegie Museum, although his parents might have been less encouraging had they known that their budding artist was drawing nude models. Eventually he won an art scholarship to Carnegie-Mellon University. After graduation he moved to New York, where he took night classes at the Art Stu-

Arabesques *shows us a myriad assortment of action, proving that Warhola enjoys making a painting busy.* **BELOW:** *The* **Magic Shop's** *contagious good humor quickly brings a grin to the face of any viewer.* **OPPOSITE:** *Fantasy nightlife from a collection of short stories entitled* **Tales from the Spaceport Bar.**

dents League in New York City with noted educator/illustrator Jack Faragasso and learned the highly systematic technical approach to illustration invented by Frank Reilly. Reilly's regime included a controlled palette with hues laid out in numbered mixtures, moving from light to dark. It also emphasized the constructive drawing of the figure, adding basic shapes—moving from large to small—to the line of action.

"Reilly's technique is good to know because it can get you out of problems," James says. "It turns the process of painting into a science, the process of making things realistic. Sometimes you get hung up on total realism, but to do fantasy—and to do it well—you really have to stretch in terms of physiology and color. If you're portraying a scene in an incredibly weird light, totally unearthly, you've got to know how to paint it. You can't set it up—it has to come from inside your head. That's where the technical knowledge comes in.

"It's one thing to learn how to paint accurately, it's another to learn how to create, and that comes from the individual. As I was studying Reilly's program I was also doing fantasy and science fiction things, painting out of my head. So it was a combination of painting and drawing from life, and practicing and drawing from my imagination, which is almost more important than anything else."

HIS FIRST PUBLISHED PIECES WERE a *Questar* magazine cover (for publisher/old friend Bill Wilson) and covers for *The Enforcer* and *The Book of Phillip Jose Farmer*. (The latter painting now hangs in Farmer's home.) James was asked to do a memorable series of paintings for Ace Books' reissue of Robert Heinlein's classic titles, and did the cover art for *Neuromancer* when it first appeared as an Ace Double. To date he has worked as a book illustrator for major publishing houses including Berkely, Warner, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, Prentice Hall, Bantam, and Avon, and his illustrations have appeared frequently in MAD and Playboy. He's been recognized by Spectrum, the annual juried collection of the best art in the fantasy and SF field, and has had his work displayed in museum shows

both here and abroad.

When necessary, James works seven days a week to meet a deadline. His basement studio—from which he has a view of the Hudson River in winter—is stuffed with reference materials including *National Geographic* magazines, photographs, books, sound equipment, his easel, and a desk for sketching. He begins work as early as possible—sometimes at three or four in the morning, right after giving daughter Oonagh her bottle—and paints steadily for four or five hours before taking a break.

A painting takes him about 10 days to complete, preceded by two weeks of preparations that include reading the manuscript, making thumbnail sketches, submitting color sketches to the publisher, and absorbing feedback. As he paints he listens to music, talk shows, or news.

About 10 years ago he was introduced to the world of children's book illustration by an insistent art director. Initially he rejected the work because it was done in watercolor, requiring him to make a wrenching shift in medium. However, intrigued by the challenge—and the promise of artistic freedom—he took the bait, taught himself how to cope with the demanding techniques required for watercolor illustration, and found his artistic home.

"The picture book format allows me to design the book and do all the illustrations—and the art directors and editors really give you a lot more freedom. Over the years I've discovered that it's the most creative area of illustration. There's room for so much range. You can be cartoony one moment and realistic the next, dramatic or more brushy or exaggerate. There's a lot of leeway. I really revel in the freedom."

"I think of the picture books as fantasy for little kids instead of adults. For me the biggest difference is in being able to portray

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Don't you sometimes wish
your real *family would finally show up and rescue you?*
Maybe they still will...

HOME

BY JAMES VAN PELT
Illustration by Walter Velez

LOTS OF TIMES when I walk through the high school like the day the monster gave me the death threat, I pretend I'm anti-matter, and the rest of everything is matter. I can't touch anything or the explosion would make Hiroshima seem like a stifled sneeze. Kids push by me on both sides, their faces intent, eyes fish-blank and staring, and I'm sweating, leaning left, pausing, avoiding a contact here, the brush of a sleeve there. The fate of the entire school rests on my ability to slip through the hallway. I stay in the middle of the flow, away from the turbulent areas next to the lockers or where the opposing streams of traffic slide by. Nothing can graze me. It's rough: Slow down, speed up, stay hyper-aware of people's positions. The cross hall that leads left to the offices and the gym to the right messes up the traffic pattern, but I negotiate through without a tag. A letter jacket dangling a cheerleader and leading a pack of sycophants blocks the way, and I fade into a calm spot by an athletic awards case until they move on.

Two boys, freshmen probably, in matching "No Fear" T-shirts, wearing visors turned upside down and backwards, are shoving at each other in front of me, mouths moving. I don't really listen; I mean, hall-noise is pure white if you don't focus on it, so I see their lips flapping, and they're goosing each other.

Of course, my game's impossible to win, even though high school kids instinctively don't like to touch. I could walk normal through a crowded hall, and nobody would contact me most of the time; but accidents happen, you know: People run into each other, and when one of the freshmen turns, he elbows me in the chest. Boom! In my mind we're all dead; the anti-matter/matter event border tearing protons, neutrons, and electrons apart, converting mass to energy in a cataclysmic spasm, and I see the shockwave in slow motion blazing through the hall, vaporizing kid after kid, not even knocking them over; just atomizing them. Then my imaginary camera peels away from the school and wide-angles from above, retreating fast as the building turns into a tiny Sun, washing the entire valley in acetylene-bright light. Only the surrounding hills that direct the blast up into the sky saves the nearby towns, and a week later the magma at the bottom of the blast crater still seethes and bubbles.

All because some freshman elbows me in the chest.

So we're all dead, and there's no point in starting over again, when I see two things at once; the first is a skinny Side-by-Side kid trying to get his walker turned around. Side-by-Side's this program at the school to "mainstream" students who most likely would be in institutions otherwise. He's got himself up against a wall and he's trying to turn that way, but every time he jerks the aluminum tubes around, he smacks into the bricks. I don't know why he can't go to his left. The Side-by-Side kids have all kinds of problems that way. I mean, some are blind and have seizures, or are both paraplegic and have fetal alcohol syndrome, and most of them look different. The womb wasn't kind to them, but they're a part of the school. Generally I don't see them in the halls with the rest of the students. Most "regular" students probably aren't even aware that the Side-by-Side kids exist. They pass before or after the bell. They have their own buses. Since I'm nontraditional myself, I know about them.

So this Side-by-Side kid is clanging his walker against the wall, whimpering to himself, and everyone else is passing by him as if he's not even alive or something, and at the same time I see him I see the monster coming toward me from the science wing.

First of all, it's big. No denying that. Its head brushes the ceiling, and these are 10-footers. Second of all, nobody else seems to notice it. High school students don't notice much, I'll grant you that. I mean, they don't pay any attention to me most of the time, and I think that's pretty odd. I would pay attention to me, if you get my drift. But they're ignoring this monster, who looks like the Pillsbury Dough Boy crossed with Klaatu's silvery robot from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. It's not the first time I've seen a monster, so I kind of track him out of the corner of my eye while helping the Side-by-Side kid.

"You've got to back up, Johnny," I say. He looks at me; there's drool on his chin, but his eyes are deep brown and lively. He slams the walker into the bricks again with an alu-

WALTER
KELLY

I GET THIS TINGLE IN THE BACK OF MY REALLY IMPORTANT TO GET THE KID OFF

minum clang and makes a frustrated whine from the back of his throat. "The wall's not going anywhere, champ," I say.

Meanwhile the monster's getting closer. As I said, they're no novelty to me. During seventh grade, when I switched foster families three times in six months, I did a lot of drugs, mostly home grown or harvested, like moonweed and the other natural pharmaceuticals that grow in the flats and canyons south of town. At first I did them to *get rid* of monsters: stupid things that woke me at night in unfamiliar beds, fear-drenched and shaking, or what I think of as my amnesia dreams: of a life I've lost and can't quite remember—long, heart-rendingly odd visions of too-tall mountains and reddish skies that left me sobbing and drained, but the drugs brought their own multitentacled things to life, and I laid off them after a while. Flashbacks hit me periodically though; a pterodactyl above the school bus or shining teeth glinting from behind a stack of books at the library doesn't surprise me all that much. Still, this monster seemed particularly persistent, walking against the flow of kids who moved around it without acknowledging its presence.

I get this tingle in the back of my neck, and it suddenly seems really important to get the kid off the wall and sprint away from here. This isn't your typical paranoid panic—I get those too; the dough boy robot's definitely coming toward me. I get behind the Side-by-Side kid and grab the left side of the walker; it's slick with his sweat, and I pull him gently backward, away from the bricks. He shuffles his feet around and completes his right-hand turn, but now he's going against the traffic; kids' faces look panicked as they realize that the Side-by-Side kid isn't going to stop coming forward. They dance around him, pressured by the crowd behind them in the eternal rush to beat the tardy bell.

"Coming through," I yell. "Cut a path!" Now we're heading away from the monster, but he's gaining. I don't get it. Most of the time my hallucinations reside in my peripheral vision and a good hard look banishes them. This one, however, takes a straight-on stare and keeps coming. People detour around too, not responding to it directly; a nerdy girl in a pink sweater actually stops in front of it because it's right in her way, pushes her glasses up on her nose, fakes right then goes around it on the left, but she doesn't seem to have really seen it. It's as if she just got it in her head that she wanted to go one way, then changed her mind and went the other. Traffic's lightening up now this late in the passing period.

The Side-by-Side kid's into his rhythm: shuffle-shuffle-lift-and-klunk, and we're coming up to his room. He swings the walker to his right and heads for the door. The bell rings. Magically, the halls have emptied. He stops just before entering and twists back (to his right, of course) toward me, his chin slick with drool, his head tilted to the side; he gurgles something.

"What?" I say. I can feel the monster approaching, maybe 20 feet away. I'm itching to run.

He gurgles again, as if he's trying to push his voice through wet leaves, then it comes out clearly, "Thanks, K." His face grimaces. Maybe it was a smile. I don't know. He shuffle-klunks into the room, and I'm stunned, the monster forgotten for a second. He knew my name! No one in the hallway ever calls me by name. In classes sometimes, when I go, I hear it, mostly by the teachers who don't know where my nickname came from and call me that without trying to be cruel.

"Thanks, K," the boy had said. The empty hallway echoes with his voice. I hear it bouncing off the lockers behind me. It is the first time I feel good about being in that school.

Then the monster taps me on the shoulder. Its touch is warm and hard. Tap, tap. I turn. Up close, I can see my own reflection, wavy and distorted, in its silver skin. I look up; its head is tilted down, as if it is studying me, but it doesn't have any eyes, no features at all; sort of like what you would get if you carved a robot monster out of silver soap, then showered with it a couple of times: no seams, no sharp edges, the short neck flowing smoothly from the rounded shoulders then widening into the Christmas ornament head.

Then, the death threat. It said, "Pack your things." The voice was real, I mean, it wasn't telepathy stuff, and it sounded like a pipe organ, high in register but more metal than organic. My flashbacks had never spoken to me before.

I froze for a second. What could I do? A 10-foot silver robot that nobody else can see has a hand on my shoulder and has told me to pack my things. It might as well have said, "Kiss your ass goodbye," or "Make peace with your maker."

I back up, and its hand slips off me. "No," I say. It's not clever repartee, but I'm a little shook. It speaks again and says, "I've come…."

"Screw you," I yell, twirling away from it and sprinting down the hall. My feet make slap-slap sounds all the way to the double doors out of the building, and I never look back.

It was the last period of the day, so skipping out doesn't sound too bad to me. Besides, geography has never been my favorite class. Long, boring lectures about Euro-Asian trade alliances and then pop quizzes on the agri-products of the rain forests. I look at the globe on the teacher's desk, thinking that if I were an alien I wouldn't land there.

I jog down the street toward my house. It's 90 degrees out; the Sun's toasty warm on top of my head. The air's got that flat, early-September anticipation in it, as if it's tired of being summer but not quite ready to give up to fall. I like it hot, so bouncing away on the road's shoulder, sweat already pouring off my face feels good. Already the tightness in my gut, the fear in the hallway, is fading, and I'm half-convinced that nothing happened there. Ten-foot-tall robots, after all; even I have a tough time swallowing that.

And I'm kind of happy until I see this boy walking toward me on my side of the road. He's a middle-school kid—they get out before the high school does; he's holding his skateboard behind his back crossways with his arms locked around each end. It gives him a Bataan Death March pose, plodding in the shoulder's dust. Across the road and a little in front of him walking in the same direction is this girl, about the same age, lost in thought, eyes focused on the ground. She's slender, wearing a lot of black, her books clenched to her chest. The boy's staring at her. I slow down. His look is clearly one of yearning. He wants her. A semi rumbles by between them. He doesn't blink or glance away. I pass on his left, only a couple of feet away; he never sees me. All his attention is locked on the girl; his face is tragic.

Suddenly, I'm by, and the guy's expression lingers in my mind, and I start crying. The whole thing's so sad and stupid—me stumbling down the road, tears mixing with sweat as I run. Nobody understands me when I talk about stuff like this. I mean, I've tried, but they give me looks as if I'm a dweeb and wander off. Here's this kid, following this girl he's probably wanted to talk to since fifth grade, and she doesn't even know he's alive. The tragedy is in the yearning; that's where I come in. I see in his face everything that I'm all about, constantly wanting to be a part of the world that doesn't know I'm there. It's my essential being: isolation. I told this to a counselor Social Services tied me into last year. After scribbling a note on a tiny pad she'd balanced on her knee, she said, "Have you tried joining a club, K?"

Which reminds me of my name. In second grade, I pretended to be a praying mantis for six days. I'd rotate my head to look at people, but I wouldn't move my shoulders or shift around; I kept my hands close to my chest, fingers out and limp. If I wanted some-

NECK, AND IT SUDDENLY SEEMS THE WALL AND SPRINT AWAY FROM HERE.

thing, like a pencil or a book, I'd stare at it for a few minutes, swaying a little side to side, then I'd pounce. It was a lot of fun, but after I'd been doing it for a while, Dan Clurge, who spoke with a thick, Southern accent, called me a "space kay-det." The "K" part stuck, and I got used to it after a while. When I change foster families, I like to take on their last name, so right now I'm K Coder, but I've been a host of others too. My favorite was K Beebee; that lasted seven months and my signature looked like a cattle brand: KBB.

I kill some time at the park, pitching rocks into the pond. That way it'll look as if I didn't leave school early. When I get to my house, I climb in the bedroom window so I won't have to talk to my foster mother, but she hears me anyway and yells, "It wouldn't kill you to use the back door, you know."

I don't say anything. She's 30; her husband drives long-haul routes and is gone most of the time, and she raises three kids of her own; they keep her hopping enough without dealing with me. When I'd first got there a few weeks ago with everything I own in a duffle bag dangling from my shoulder, she gave me the once-over; I could tell she was mentally inventorying me. The hair probably bothered her: I'd shagged it out, dyed it henna-red, and braided four tight strands that fell across my face. I'd shave it off—really I would: hair feels weird to me—but henna-red is in. I thought maybe the New Age crowd might take me on, or the skate-boarders; they seem the most open minded, but they didn't as always. Then my clothes didn't do anything for her either: flannel jacket, no buttons, no shirt underneath; an old pair of gray sweats I'd chopped at the knees, and blue running shoes, no socks. She shook her head and said, "What planet are you from?"

I wonder myself.

The evening comes. I stay in the room, watching the Sun set all flaming and glorious but I'm still thinking about that kid walking down the street. By the time the first stars come out I've come to no conclusions. I'm wondering if I can sneak into the kitchen to get something to eat without anyone seeing me when my foster mother walks in. She doesn't say hi or anything.

"The school called and said you ditched your last class."

I can tell she's mad, but she's holding it. Her hands fist at her hips, clenching a bit of her skirt on both sides. She's probably a pretty woman if she didn't look so tired all the time: nice, high cheekbones. "We lose your support check from the government if you're dropped from the school, and I can't have that. You either straighten up and fly right or get your butt out of here. Is that clear?"

I don't know what to say to that because just as I open my mouth the silver monster pokes its head up in the window behind her. I figure it must be bending over or on its knees since the window's not that high. After a few seconds—my foster mother's rhetorical question hanging in the air, me not replying and probably looking like an idiot since I'm staring past her—she "humphs" disgustedly and stomps out of the room, slamming the door behind her that pops right back open because the latch is broke.

"Pack your things," it says in its pipe organ voice. "I've come to take you home." And I'm out of the room, heart pounding through the top of my head, dashing by my foster mother who's still walking down the hallway, and I don't stop running until I'm at the edge of town.

What does that mean: "I've come to take you home"? Is it like what the airlines call "Your final destination"? The happy hunting grounds? I don't like the sounds of it, whatever it means.

Past the last street lights, the asphalt turns into fine gravel, ending up at the "Odd-Fellows" cemetery, where at the turn of the century they buried Jews, "citizens of color," and indigents. It's my favorite place even though it seems ghoulish considering that a hallucination is threatening to put me here permanently. A breeze picks up the smell of fresh-cut grass from the Catholic cemetery across the road. Here, long weeds brush the tombstones.

I'm breathing hard, resting my back against Amelia Nurenberg's stone, thinking about what I'm going to do. See, I can live with a lot of stuff: kids who don't like me, teachers who only keep me in class because they have to, foster families one right after another. Those kinds of things bother me, but they're no biggie. Harder-to-explain annoyances get to me more: like feeling like my body doesn't fit me, or that sounds are too sharp, or that music rhythms are always off, or that none of the things I'm supposed to care about matter a fig and all the things I do care about nobody understands.

I'm at a break point though when a hallucination won't go away. Something's got to change. Not the world, certainly. It's got all this weight on its side. I'm outnumbered, so it's got to be me. I snap a long strand of weed off the grave mound and put it between my teeth. The taste is sharp, like almond extract, and there's a kind of anesthetic effect because my lips go a little tingly. How can I change? Of course, that's the problem. Nobody *wants* to be insane. Nobody *wants* to be unhappy. But if I did change, if I could even do it, what would I become? Another of those blank-eyed students in the hall who can't see when a Side-by-Side kid needs some help? And what really gets me is what if *they* all have some inner block, like that kid who couldn't go left, except that theirs is psychological; that they all have some mental thing that they fetch up to in their head just as solid as that brick wall, and within their skulls there's this metal clanging going on all the time that they can't even hear anymore because they've learned to ignore it? Would I even want to be like that?

So I'm leaning on a gravestone, listening to the hiss of weeds and the nice, cool silence of the Moon and stars, and all my options look untenable. Still, the monster is pushing the issue. It's a new variable in the equation. I don't know what it means, but things can't stay the same.

Then I see the monster coming toward me from the edge of the cemetery, bathed in moonlight, walking silently between the stones; it's like a ghost. It couldn't have found me; it must have a homing device or something. Hiding's not an option. I'm trying not to breathe too loud, but I hear myself just the same: shaky and clear in the night air. I have this vision of it reaching me, rending me limb from limb, and in my fear I almost laugh because it suddenly occurs to me that the Grim Reaper is supposed to be darkly cloaked, carrying a scythe; not 10 feet tall, silver, and fat.

I hadn't thought of this before, but in the hallway it touched me. A hallucination that doesn't go away when you stare straight at it, that other people go around instead of through, that talks, doesn't change, and takes a reasonable amount of time to go from place to place isn't a hallucination at all. It reminds me of what somebody told me once: "If it swims like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck." The monster's real.

I can't stay, so I run, and the only place I have is my foster house, so I sneak in again and hide under my blankets like a little kid, convinced the whole time that the monster followed me back and is staring at me all night through that window that's too small for it to go through, waiting to say, "Pack your things. I've come to take you home."

In the morning, when I awoke, the monster wasn't at the window, but my foster mother sat on the edge of the bed as if she'd been there forever waiting for me to wake up. I pull up my blankets under my chin, not all that surprised to see her. The room's not mine, after all,

Continued on page 87

I MET A TRAVELER

Continued from page 44

meaning in the smallest thing. As he looked up again, squinting, he could see meaning in the shadows of the clouds and the pulsing silver streak of stars overhead. He felt himself looking at a book with words scrawled on the margins and between the lines, words appearing by themselves, filling up and overflowing every space until the book became every book, every story told to its end, understood clear and full.

"I brought a gun. I couldn't cut myself," Susie said. "I couldn't with the knife."

Embarrassed, he had almost forgotten she was there. In everything, he had neglected her, he realized. It had all been about him. She had lost both her parents as a teenager, had lived in foster homes. They had been so alike, but he had been angrier, more full of himself. She had believed in him and he had used her.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"No," she said, licking blood trickling from her nose on to her lip, "no. I did it. I trapped you here."

He shook his head.

"No," she said. "I wanted you to kill yourself. God, it sounds so sick. I wanted to be that important to someone. But I don't want to die."

He took her hand and closed his eyes. Even through his eyelids, he could see the light of the stars, becoming brighter and brighter.

"Then don't."

"I have to let you go."

He shook his head.

"I can't tell you what I see. I can't translate. But all I see is more life. And I know all I have to do is love you enough to let you go."

She looked at him intently.

"Just sit for a while with me, and that will be enough."

"What's it like, being dead?"

He shook his head.

"I can't say. It's like all the things you've done and don't remember and aren't thinking about. It's like that all the time. Things you saw all the time but didn't look at."

She leaned in to him gratefully.

"Try to tell me what you see," she said.

He whispered to her the words he saw insinuated in the sky. She told him things she had never told him, pain he had never touched, and he felt a pang of longing. But he knew he could not regret anything any more. Before dawn, they kissed lightly before he climbed back into his grave and closed his tired eyes.

HE WATCHED AS SHE FILLED EARTH into his open grave, patting it down with her hands. She climbed over the fence and he followed her walking home until clouds passed before the Moon, darkening his face, then he turned from the living earth and stepped behind the flashing sky. ❦

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SECRET

Continued from page 53

ever. *But if you fail this test*, I have to hope another man will come who won't fail. I have thought I was in love before. Maybe I'll think I am in love again, another time. Maybe no more will come at all. I have to wait anyway, and hope. That's my condition. My condition is waiting. My condition is loneliness."

He looked at her with tortured eyes. Then he heaved himself up on his horse and kicked it into a trot, heading east out of her land.

Traditionally, knights earn glory by dint of invasion and possession. Can knights learn not to invade, learn to respect other people's possessions? Can a knight learn to apologize to a woman? Can men be sensitive guys but still be strong knights? What do you think?

In the world of fantasy, anything is possible.

DARCIA WAITED THROUGH ONE EMPTY DAY, then another. Sometimes she cried.

Sometimes she spoke violently out loud, begging Palavere to realize the way she had said those last words, imploring him to ask forgiveness. She imagined conversations in which he apologized, and then she would beg his forgiveness in return for imposing such a difficult test.

When could she expect him to pass this way again? Maybe when he had found the book of the Hierophant at the Well, maybe when he was returning south, he would come back to her castle. It would take him about 30 days to go and come.

Maybe he would never return, and in a year or so, or in five years or 10, another man would come. Maybe Palavere himself was not the one, but a harbinger, a sign that times were changing out there, beyond her borders. Maybe the next knight would do it all perfectly.

She hated the next knight already.

On the third day, her face red and blotchy and her eyes dreary from crying, Darcia climbed a green hill he had liked, remembering his hand in hers. She gazed northward, wondering what Palavere was thinking at that moment.

Over a ridge to the north a white horse appeared, moving at a gentle trot. The figure on its back had red hair. They were aiming a little too far to the east.

Darcia smiled as radiantly as the sunny day. Palavere always did figure things out fast. She began to jump and wave her hands over her head.

She saw her knight turn his head, then raise a hand to shield his eyes from the sun. Palavere stood up in the stirrups, then waved in response, and settling back into the saddle he kicked his horse into a gallop. ❧

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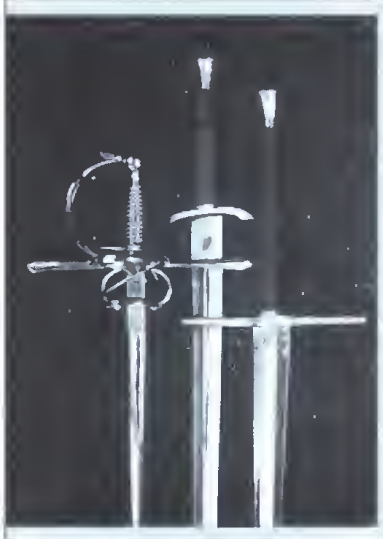

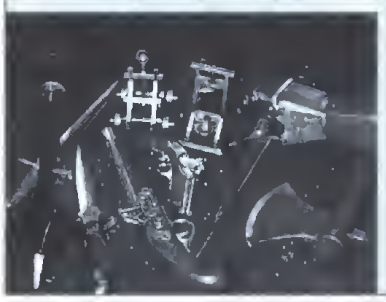

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INNER INNER CITY

Continued from page 67

At last he turned and looked directly at me. I felt but couldn't see his smile. His eyes, even at this distance, remained distinct: yellow, vulpine.

He smiled, folded his arm around Michelle as if claiming a trophy, and turned a corner I have never been able to find. I suppose it had been a sort of contest all along—the ultimate Challenge.

That was the last I saw of her.

THE INVISIBLE CITY SEALS ITS EXITS. ENTER once and walk away. Enter twice and the way back to the world is more elusive.

Enter a third time —

I WALKED FOR HOURS—IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN days—but every road turned back to the elliptical streets and jigsaw alleys of the hidden city.

ONLY A FEW OF US LIVE IN THE SECRET CITY, and we seldom speak. Things work differently here. It is, I think, a sort of mirror world, an empty and imperfect shell of a city, sparsely colonized.

Its shabbily furnished upper rooms are mainly empty. I live in one now. I sleep on its crude spring mattress and I gaze through its grime-crusted windows and I breathe its dry and dust-heavy air. I eat what I find in unattended stores—canned food without labels. The stock is periodically replenished. I don't know how.

Something in the hidden city inhibits curiosity, and memory… memory fades into the air like morning fog.

I write to remember. I write in these lined tablets of cheap pulp paper manufactured in Taiwan or Indonesia, places incomprehensibly far away.

I think I'm not the only one. I think there are others scribing their thin and thinning memoirs, diary entries that grow more stark with each passing day, letters to lovers whose names we have forgotten.

Spring now. The wind is cold, wet, cutting.

I do not despair of finding a way home. Just yesterday I thought I saw Deirdre wandering the precincts—looking for me, perhaps; but if she's found the hidden city, she needs to be warned.

I called her name, but she vanished.

If you find this, will you warn her?

And if you know Michelle, if you see Michelle, please give her these pages.

I mail the pages from my window. I mail them on the wind. As yesterday. As the day before. On a good day the wind carries the yellow leaves of paper up above the stone capitals and pebbled roofs, above the tar paper and the wind vanes and the chimneys of the hidden city, and I hope and believe that for the wind there are no borders; the wind, I think, is utterly invisible and utterly free. ❧

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BOOKS

Continued from page 19

thinking the war will quickly end. Among the British, though, he feels alienated. The only friend he makes is a Canadian, LeBlanc, who enjoys killing Germans a bit too much. After a few battlefield experiences, the romance of the war disintegrates, and Travis begins drinking heavily and constantly.

In this half-drunk nightmare of trench warfare, shelling, gas attacks, and exhausting physical labor, interspersed with long stretches of boredom, Travis begins to dream about a dark, peaceful cemetery with terraces and flowers and marble angels. The dead are watched over by a girl wearing a blue calico dress, whose presence comforts and reassures Travis. As the men in the platoon die, they appear in glass-covered graves in the cemetery. Travis comes to believe it is a way-station of sorts that the dead must pass through on their way to a more permanent location, and he feels he must help to guide them. Travis also begins to see the dead during his waking hours, and to sense which of his comrades will die and which will make it home safely.

Intruding on these peaceful graveyard visions is the harshness of war. Anthony describes trench warfare vividly and in great detail, conveying the filth, the terror, and the omnipresence of death. Travis discovers that his friend, LeBlanc, is guilty of worse violence than Travis's father ever committed. Yet LeBlanc's fearless incursions enemy lines have made him into a decorated hero, a hero the British officers feel is needed to motivate the other men. Travis's relationship with LeBlanc, which reflects his relationship with his abusive father, is one of the most fascinating aspects of the novel. When Travis discovers LeBlanc's crimes, he turns him in. When his commanding officer refuses to take action, Travis nearly beats LeBlanc to death, wanting to prevent him from committing further crimes. But something stops him from completing the task. Later, when Travis believes LeBlanc is on the verge of arrest, he actually does the man a kindness, trying to leave him with a pleasant memory before he must face the firing squad. This relationship embodies haunting questions about love, understanding, and forgiveness.

While the first person narration (the book is told through letters from Travis to his younger brother) at times fails to give a clear description of supporting characters and events, and the pace of the book could have benefited from tightening and condensing, Patricia Anthony succeeds in taking us to a foreign, compelling land, a land where the line between fantasy and reality has become blurred, where men must face their demons in a trial by fire that will shape their destiny in this world and the next.

—Jeanne Cavelos

FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 35

Raven Tales: Traditional Stories of Native Peoples by Peter Goodchild.

England, like North America, is a land rich with ancestral stories—including those of the "winged relatives" with whom we share the bountiful earth. When I head back to Arizona next winter, I intend to take the following prayer along with the feathers I have promised to gather. It comes from the Gaelic highlands of Scotland, recorded one hundred years ago—but it would not have been out of place inside a tipi, among drums and cedar smoke....

Power of raven be yours, Power of eagle be yours, Power of the Fiann.

Power of storm be yours, Power of moon be yours, Power of sun.

Power of sea be yours, Power of land be yours, Power of heaven.

Goodness of sea be yours, Goodness of earth be yours, Goodness of heaven.

Each day be joyous to you, No day be grievous to you, Honor and compassion.

Love of each face be yours, Death on pillow be yours, And God be with you.

**[I am indebted to Brian and Wendy Froud, Alan Lee, and Jeremy Thres for the use of their folklore libraries. Previous Folkroots columns can be found on the Endicott Studio Web site: http://www.endicott-studio.com/index.html]*

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MORE GUESTS TO BE ANNOUNCED

BY ERIC BAKER

Adventuring in dungeons or tombs can be just as deadly as a jaunt into the city.

IN A MARKET WHERE YOU ARE CONSTANTLY BEING PUSHED TO BUY A FASTER COMPUTER with more memory and a better 3-D card, ***Might and Magic VI: The Mandate of Heaven*** (by Jon Van Caneghem, 3DO and New World Gaming, Redwood, CA 1998) is a refreshing find. It runs on a Pentium 100 chip and it doesn't require a 3-D card. Even better than that, you can get 100 to 200 hours of play before you finish the game. *M&M VI* is a good game for everyone, but it is particularly good for those who aren't yet ready to spend all the money necessary to upgrade their machines so they can play *Unreal*.

M &M VI is a computer roleplaying game. Not to be confused with the paper and dice games reviewed later, *M&M VI* only allows you to do the things it is programmed to administer, but those things are pretty extensive. You take command of a party of four adventurers in the medieval setting of Enroth. The wars portrayed in *Heroes of Might & Magic II* are over and the good guys won, but now the good King Roland Ironfist has mysteriously disappeared. His weak son, Nicolai, sits on the throne, but calamities beset the realm and the people fear that the Ironfist Dynasty has lost the Mandate of Heaven—the divine right to rule. Your job is to build up your characters from novices to heroes, and save the land and the King.

If you come to *M&M VI* used to playing first-person shooters like *Quake*, or adventure games like *Bladerunner*, the two hardest things to get used to are that you are playing more than one character and that you have to consciously improve all of them. At the beginning you have to pick your four characters from the six character classes available, adjust the points among their six characteristics, purchase for them levels in your choice of the 25 skills, get the spellcasters started in a couple of the nine schools of magic, and then hand out a few of the 150 spells. There are simply too many things for any one character to do. You have to specialize among your characters and have them build on their specialties.

RIGHT: Create legendary heroes playing Might and Magic VI. *BELOW: Struggle against the forces of chaos in* Mage: The Sorcerer's Crusade, *a new RPG from White Wolf Game Studio.*

Graphically, *M&M VI* is a strange mixture of dulling sameness and wild variety. What it reminds you of is *Doom* with 170 different kinds of monsters. You move about the map, going from town to town and dungeon to dungeon, in real time, with 2-D mapped images on 3-D polygons like those familiar from Doom. You encounter NPCs and monsters, each class of whom has their own look but are all identical within the class. Thus, when you begin the game by walking into the town of New Sorpigal, you encounter tons of peasants. There is one graphic for female peasants and one for male peasants. To tell one individual from another, you have to click on them and read the name and profession that comes up. Similarly, all goblins look the same, all rats, etc. If you enter a building or start up a conversation with an NPC then the scrolling goes away and you get a painted picture of the person as well as a list of the things they will talk about. Obviously the main job of *M&M VI* is killing. Your characters have to kill to get experience so that they can rise in levels to attain better skills so they can kill more powerful things. Each success raises the characters' reputation and brings them closer to solving the mystery of the King's disappearance.

Addictively engrossing, *M&M VI* is an attractive game that places more emphasis on play and story than on high-tech eye candy. It is not a game to be started and finished in an afternoon, but rather it is a commitment to create and build characters that can do great virtual

neil gaiman dave mckean

Some people have great ideas maybe once or twice in their life, and then they discover electricity or fire or outer space or something. I mean the kind of brilliant ideas that change the whole world.

Some people never have them at all.

I get them two or three times a week.

The Day I Swapped My Dad For Two Goldfish

In trade paperback November 1998

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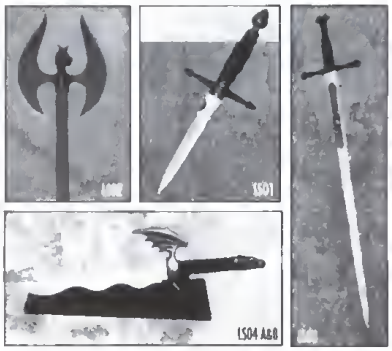

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deeds and save the endangered kingdom.

City of Lies: A Campaign Setting for Legend of the Five Rings. *By Greg Stolze. Alderac Entertainment Group, Ontario, CA 1998.*

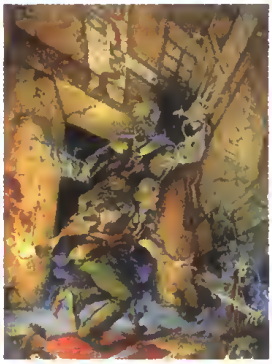
Speaking of endangered kingdoms, welcome to Rokugan, the Emerald Empire, the setting for Alderac Entertainment Group's fantasy roleplaying game, *Legend of the Five Rings*. Based on the collectable card game, *LotFR* is set in a fictional land with a medieval Japanese background.

The latest *LotFR* supplement is the boxed set, *City of Lies*. A guide to the central city of Ryoko Owari (the City of Lies), the box contains a *Player's Guide*, a *Game Master's Guide*, a map of the city and a guide book, a big color map of Rokugan, and a small book called *Ashidaka's Journal*. This last can be important because it is the journal of the previous magistrate of the city, and one hook for the campaign is to have the characters play the new magistrates.

The politics of Rokugan revolve around the seven clans; the City of Lies stands on a crossroads in the territory of the Scorpion Clan. The Scorpions make almost a religion of their love of secrets, so much so that every member of the clan wears a mask whenever they are in public. Scorpions make it their business to know all that can be known and to profit from that knowledge.

The three books of the boxed set are relatively easy to use. They are cross-referenced without actually being indexed, indexes being a common omission from AEG books. Each NPC, location, custom, and threat to the city is assigned an alphanumeric code that can be used to look up the person, place, or thing in any of the books. The writing is clear and original, interesting without being humorous. The *GM's Guide* contains full statistics for any character likely to end up in a fight, but only descriptions of those who probably won't. Which is a little frustrating. Even though you'll never be in combat with her, it would have been interesting to know the Governor's intelligence.

Besides all the background in the three books, the boxed set also contains two adventures and numerous "plot hooks." The Opium War is a campaign-length adventure that takes several sessions to play. Yemon's Legacy is a much quicker, but less detailed, adventure whose conclusion nets the players an artifact whose use will be explained in a future supplement. How's that for a cheap marketing trick? The plot hooks are little three-paragraph ideas scattered in the margins of the *GM's guide*. They provide a circumstance, thoughts about who is involved, and a short description of possible NPC reactions.



TOP: Politics in City of Lies. *MIDDLE: Return to TSR's origin with* Return to the Tomb of Horrors. *BELOW: Hercules and Xena RPG.*

Legend of the Five Rings is a simple, innovative system whose terminology takes some getting used to. It is also pretty deadly. I recommend either keeping your player characters out of combat by playing up the political part of the city, or else buying the GM's Screen and using the reincarnation rules therein. Those quibbles aside, *Legend of the Five Rings* is the best roleplaying game I've encountered since Feng Shui. If you like urban adventure, the samurai mystique, and the "polite" arena of politics, then you will really enjoy exploring the *City of Lies*.

Hercules: The Legendary Journeys & Xena: Warrior Princess Roleplaying Game. *By George Strayton. West End Games. Honesdale, PA 1998.*

Okay, here's my biggest complaint, right off the bat. Callisto isn't inside *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys & Xena: Warrior Princess Roleplaying Game*. She's on the cover, but she isn't in either of the rule books or in any of the three adventures. Joxer is in there, and Salmoneus and Autolycus and all the gods. I know that Callisto is currently dead on the show, but so are Strife and Gabrielle and half the monsters listed, but they are all in the book. Callisto isn't. I can only assume that she is going to get her own source book. Hopefully soon.

The *H&X RPG* is from those masters of licensed products, West End Games. It is written by George Strayton in the voice of Salmoneus. George does a good Salmoneus, although he does a dead-on Aphrodite, both in her character description and in one of the three adventures that comes in the boxed set. Besides the adventures, the box contains two books, the *Hero's Guide* (a player's handbook) and *Secrets of the Ancient World* (a GM's guide), Game Master's screen, and six specially marked six-sided dice used to resolve the various action rolls in the game.

Let's talk about the dice because they

aren't the ones you already have in your bag. In the *H&X RPG*, you are provided with six dice. Five of them have a Chakram (that's Xena's throwing disk) on four faces and a hydra on two. The sixth dice has three Chakrams and one hydra, plus an Eye of Hera and a Thunderbolt of Zeus. The sixth dice is called the Wild Die, with an Eye of Hera meaning an especially bad result, and a Thunderbolt of Zeus meaning an especially good one. Obviously you want Chakrams and thunderbolts, each one counting as a success; hydras and eyes are failures.

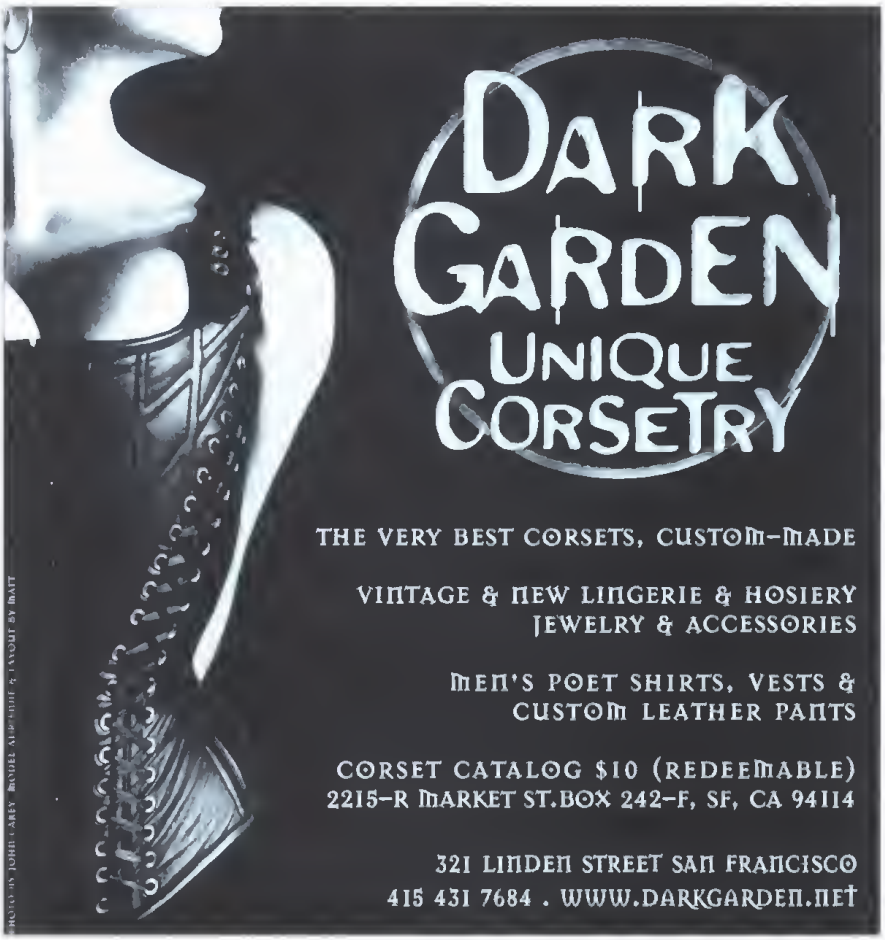
The Introduction doesn't say so, but from the special dice to the joke-laden rule books to basic simplicity of the system, my guess is that the *H&X RPG* is intended for people who are new to gaming, but are fans of the TV shows. This is an admirable goal. The overall RPG market has been shrinking, and I'm in favor of anything that brings new people to it, particularly teenagers and children. I think, however, that West End should have been a little less worried about complexity scaring people off, because in their effort to simplify, they have hurt anyone's ability (regardless of their experience with role-playing) to actually play the game.

The *H&X RPG* cries out for an index. *The Hero's Guide* for the has a Table of Contents with five entries. Worse, the entries are poetic rather than descriptive. If you are a new player, and you want to know what to roll to avoid falling down a hill, do you look in *Scroll I—A World of Adventure* or *Scroll II—Heroes*? The answer is Scroll II, but if you can remember that, you still have to page through the 40 pages of that scroll to find it.

For a set of roleplaying rules, The *H&X RPG* is a fun read. The system is simple and clean, easy to administer and to play, and it leads to circumstances and outcomes like those of the two TV series. At the same time, the rule books are poorly organized and unindexed, and thus hard to use. The special dice are initially handy, but limiting in the long run. If you've never picked up an RPG before then this might be the place to start, but if you are a gaming veteran, you are more likely to end up using the books as source material for a system you are already using. Xena in the world of Rokugan perhaps?

Return to the Tomb of Horrors: An Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Adventure. *By Bruce R. Cordell. TSR, Inc. Renton, WA 1998.*

In the mists of the late 70's, long before you could find *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* books in stores, before, in fact, there was such a thing as *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*, E. Gary Gygax wrote a dungeon module called *Tomb of Horrors*. It was a more or less random collection of tricks, traps, and monsters created as a reaction to his feeling that the player characters in *D&D* were having too easy a time of it in most dungeons. There was a solution to everything in the module, but it might take you more than one character to find it.



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A favorite at conventions for years, *Tomb of Horror* was the first dungeon module that TSR ever printed, and now, all these years later, so many years that Mr. Gygax no longer even works for the company he founded, TSR is bringing out a boxed set sequel to the original module called *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*. Compared to the original's 12 pages of text, *Return* is a much bigger undertaking. It contains five booklets totaling 284 pages, a card sheet, a GM's Screen, player handouts, and a facsimile of the original module.

Obviously a lot of back story has been added to the mix, and players have to work their way through the plot, finding a reason to go to the Tomb of Horrors before they can arrive and confront its new menaces. In other words, an attempt has been made to change the adventure from an exercise in problem solving into an actual story. By and large it works. The characters are much better grounded by the time they reach the dungeon, and have a better understanding of what is at stake. As to whether this will help them once the spikes start flying out of the walls and the undead begin to rise around them is an open question.

Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade. By Phil Brucaton. White Wolf Game Studio, Clarkston, GA 1998.

Speaking of the undead. As part of White Wolf's campaign to spread their World of Darkness milieu to every era and location on the planet, the studio has come out with *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*. The original *Mage* game was set in the modern world where you played sorcerers struggling against the forces of reason to keep the planet safe for vampires, werewolves, and other creatures of the night. Now in *Mage: TSC*, the time period is the dawn of the Renaissance and you are back on the right side, playing the fledgling forces of order, struggling to break the stultifying grip that dangerous magicians and fearsome supernatural creatures have on humanity.

True as this is, it is an injustice to this eclectic and far-ranging game to reduce it to such a small nutshell. White Wolf tried to cover this period of time before when they owned the Ars Magica system, but Ars was limited in its scope to just Europe and to just one order of mages. *Mage: TSC* still contains Ars Magica's Order of Hermes, used under license now that Ars has moved to Atlas Games, but now the Hermetics are just one of nine mystic traditions, and there are seven Orders of Reason to balance them.

In keeping with White Wolf's house style, *Mage: TSC* is long on background and advice on play while being short on actual rules. If your group has always liked the style of White Wolf's games, but been turned off by who the "heroes" are, then *Mage: TSC* may be the game for you. If you prefer a more concrete system, like say Ars Magica, then there is plenty here to bring to your existing campaign.

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and I've had this kind of speech before. I could have written her lines for her.

She starts with a sigh, her hands together in her lap, not looking at me. "I phoned my husband last night," she says. "And we talked about it for a long time." She twists her hands around, as if she's washing them. Her nails are neatly trimmed. No polish. "This isn't working out the way we hoped... you staying with us." She sighs again, and I think she's on the edge of crying. "It's not that we don't like you, or that you're a bad boy, really, but we think you might fit in better with another family."

I *have* heard it before, but I still feel small. No different than when I was five or six or seven. I'm thinking, if this were a movie script, I'd reach out and hug her and call her Mom and all would be forgiven, or I'd get angry and yell names, but I don't really know her. She doesn't know me. It's just awkward.

"It's okay," I say.

She sits for another minute, never looks at me, and with a final sigh, stands and leaves the room.

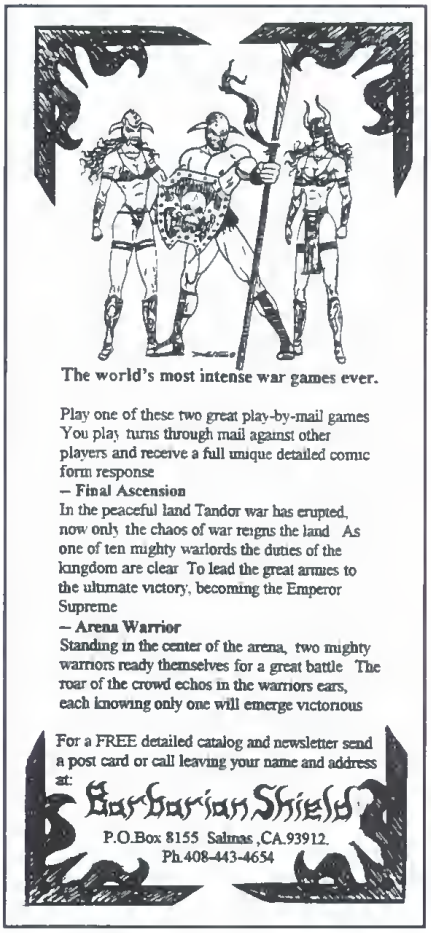
I don't want to cause her any problems. It's not her fault, so I put the clothes I brought with me into my duffle bag along with a couple of books that I've carried around for years, and head for school. I figure that I'll go to Social Services after classes and talk to them about a new placement. Most of the time they move pretty fast on foster parents' requests, since Social Services doesn't want to lose them as residence sites, and I figure that I could be in a new house tonight.

Jogging's tough carrying a bag, so I walk. Everything looks empty. The cottonwoods along the way seem to be barely hanging onto their leaves, even though they haven't started turning color yet. The sound of tires on the road sounds muffled and dead. I don't hear a single bird the whole way.

Then I'm not in my first class for five minutes before I get a note to come to the assistant principal's office, and 10 minutes after that, I'm expelled for too many unexcused absences.

So this all sounds pretty tragic, right? I'm sitting outside of the school by the bus loop, my duffle bag between my legs; these tears are just rolling down my cheeks, and I don't care. School's stupid. I never fit in there, and it shouldn't be a big deal that my foster family wants me to move on, but, still, I'm crying, feeling as if the whole world has a plan for itself, and I'm not part of it. I'm a minority of one, an alien, a special interest group that no one's interested in. My whole life's spinning in my head, and I'm half-thinking that if I could throw up I might feel a little better.

It seems like a long time, but it wasn't, because I stop sniffling when, like yesterday, two things happen at once: First, a gleam out on the football field catches my eye. It's the



silver monster, and this time it's not moving; he's just standing there facing my direction. Then the last bus of the day pulls up to the stop; it's the Side-by-Side program bus. Some of the kids come out the regular door by themselves; some need assistance, while a wheelchair lift in the back is unloading some others. I've watched this other days. The process can take 20 minutes.

So I'm watching the bus unload, and I'm watching the monster. In the clear light of the morning, standing in the middle of the short-cropped green of the football field, the silver robot looks a lot less threatening, almost pretty. I've lost the hollow spot already; whatever happens is going to happen. When something ends, something else begins. Once again, I'm on the edge of a new chapter in my life.

Then, the guy that I helped yesterday gets out of the bus. A teacher helps him down and holds him under one arm while the driver hands out the walker. The kid concentrates mightily getting his hands placed right, and I realize that he must stay up in that walker mostly by force of will because his legs look useless. I wonder why he doesn't use a wheelchair, but I admire the effort. It takes him two or three tries to get moving. He leans back to get the walker off the ground, then kind of falls forward to move the walker a few inches. It's an amazing display.

He spots me, jerks the walker to his right, and starts in my direction, a big grin on his face. His muscles bunch under his shirt; he lifts and comes forward. Shuffle-shuffle. All his motions are focused, intense, irresistible, and I realize, nothing will stop him. If he miscalculates, he'll turn a 360 to get back on track. If he falls down, he'll figure a way to get up. I think he knows who he is. He and his walker work together to get him wherever he's going, and it doesn't matter to him that no one in the halls knows him. He's moving in his own way, and that's enough.

That's enough, I think; then I laugh, because it's not. You can't do it on your own. You've got to have help or you'll go crazy. Anyone could tell you that.

He reaches me. He strains in his throat for a second, then says, "Hi, K."

It's beautiful. I've put it all together. The bus gleams bright yellow in this world's Sun. *This* world's Sun, not mine. Mine is someplace else; it has to be. Behind the bus, the cottonwoods seem perkier, more alive and ready to soak up the rays. The boy's face shines in the light of his happiness. He got to me. He said hi. He found someone who would help, and it was me.

I'm not sure what to say to him, but I know what I've got to do. I've got to find my help. I've got to go where I belong.

Finally, I drape my duffle bag over the front of his walker. Out in the football field, the silver robot waits. I'm going to it. My rescue has finally arrived. "You can keep my things," I say. "They've come to take me home." ❦

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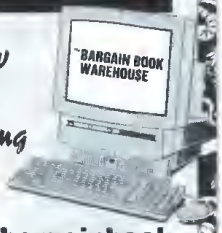

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Continued from page 73

a whole story in many pictures: There's usually 20 per book. It is a lot more fun and interesting to work on a whole book than merely do the cover. In fact, I've always wished that science fiction and fantasy books would feature illustrations."

After a 10-year detour into watercolor he is coming back to oils. "As soon as I picked up the oils again I said: This is really my medium." He enjoys their forgiving nature and lustrous color effects. James prefers canvas as a support but also paints in oil on masonite.

His recipe for a good fantasy cover? "You can't get away from the fact that a book is a package and you're competing with other books. You've got to keep that in mind. You've got to make certain concessions in that way. But the priority is a good scene. I look for a dynamic scene whenever possible. It's a small image so it has to work from a distance. And it has to have an overall good color scheme, something that makes it stand out a little."

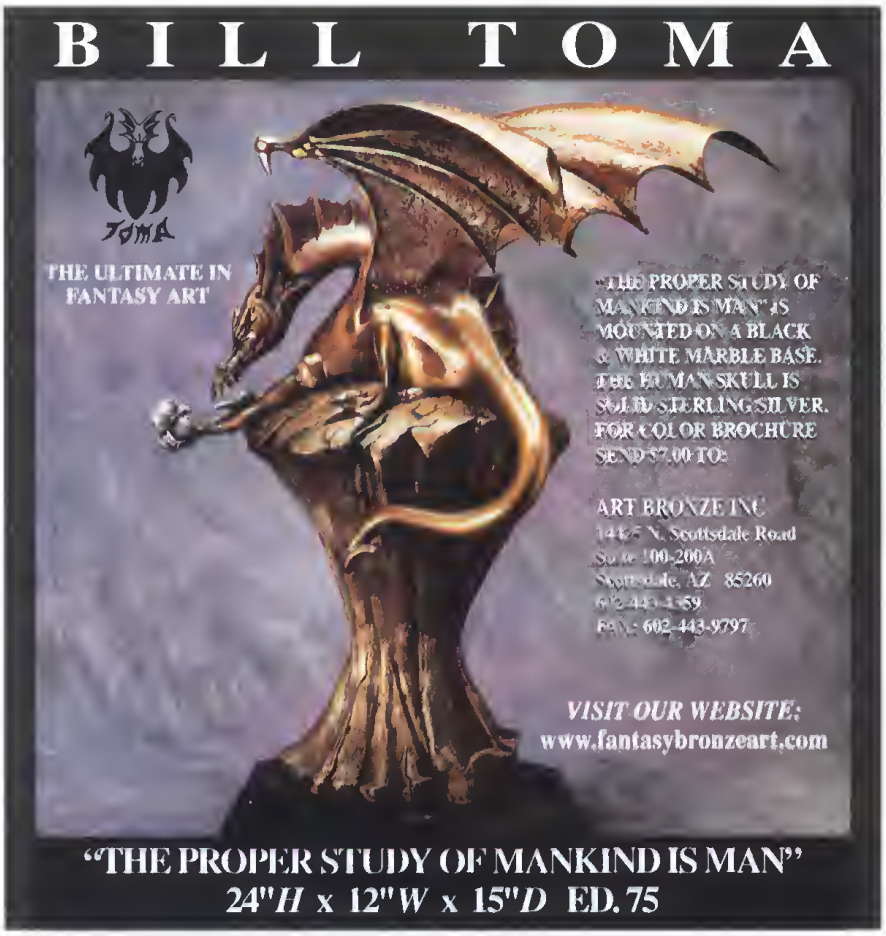
However, he's getting tired of making too many concessions to editors and art directors. "Some art directors want you to do something sellable, regardless of the book's content. But I tend to be loyal to the book. I've read books and been disappointed where the story was nothing like the scene on the cover."

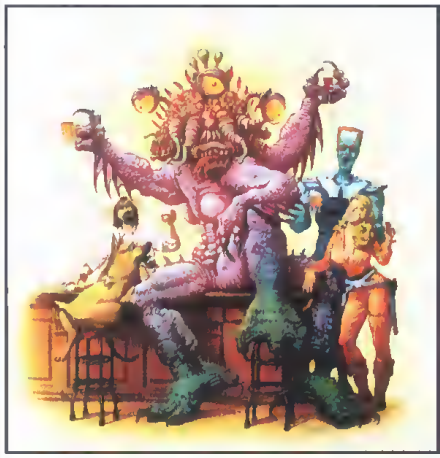
To avoid cheating future readers, Warhola plans to write and illustrate his own children's books, perhaps in collaboration with his wife, Mary Carroll. "Often I've come across stories that I wanted to change—you become so involved in the story as an illustrator that you can really see how the narrative works—and eventually I began to think that the perfect situation would be when the writer and illustrator are one and the same."

Although he admires the work of former neighbor James Gurney, creator of *Dinotopia*, he's not planning to take on fantasy world-building. "I'm not ready for an epic yet. Thirty-two pages, maybe, at the most, and only seven of those have to be typewritten. The best children's stories don't have more than 10 pages of typed narrative."

James also hopes that he'll have time to do more independent fantasy-related paintings. A one-man retrospective of his fantasy and children's book work will be offered at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, Md., in October 1999.

Regardless of the subject or medium, one thing seems certain when it comes to the art of James Warhola: The emphasis for both artist and viewer is on having a good time. "I think of my work as being lighthearted, whether oils or watercolor, children's books or adult. I really lean toward humor in the work. I have a lot of fun. And I want the viewer to do the same." ❧





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Contributors

FIONA KELLEGHAN IS A LIBRARIAN at the University of Miami. She attended Clarion West in 1995, and has published essays about SF, fantasy and horror in *Science Fiction Studies, Extrapolation, The New York Review of Science Fiction,* and other magazines and books. *The Secret in the Chest* is Fiona's first fiction sale.

David M. Sandner both writes and studies fantastic literature. As an academic, he is working on his Ph.D. in English at the University of Oregon. His scholarly book, *The Fantastic Sublime: Romanticism and Transcendence in Nineteenth-Century Children's Fantasy Literature,* came out in November from Greenwood Press. His essays appear in *Extrapolations, The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* and *Mythlore.* As a writer, his work has appeared in *Asimov's, Pulphouse* and *Dragons,* an anthology. He attended Clarion West in 1987. David also has a science fiction novel, entitled *The Wilderness of Stars,* slowly taking shape, as well as three short stories in the works.

Peni R. Griffin is an Air Force Brat. Her childhood was spent reading and taking long car trips as they moved from Texas to Alaska, Alaska to Iowa (while her father was in 'Nam), Iowa to Maryland, and Maryland back to Texas. Peni came to San Antonio to attend two universities, graduating from neither. In 1987 she married Michael D. Griffin. Griffin's secret identity is a word processor for an appraisal firm. Her ninth book, *Margo's House,* was published in October 1997. Her best known books are *Switching Well,* and the Edgar-nominated mystery *The Treasure Bird.* Projects currently making the rounds of publishers include a ghost story, a time travel story involving mammoth hunters on the Edwards plateau, a young adult lesbian novella and a novel-length fairy tale.

Mary O'Keefe Young graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York City in 1982. Mary tries to create a magical quality with her watercolors by using dramatic light. Capturing the beauty of human expression is of prime importance in her work. A love of the natural world and art history is also evident in her artwork. Mary's studio is in her home in White Plains, New York. She enjoys using family or friends as models and dressing them up in costumes which she has collected or sewn herself.

Robert Charles Wilson was born in California but has lived most of his life in Canada. He has resided in Vancouver, B.C. and currently lives in Toronto, Ontario. His first novel, *A Hidden Place,* was published in 1986. *Mysterium,* his sixth novel won the Philip K. Dick Award in 1995. His novelette, *The Perseids,* published in *Realms of Fantasy,* won the Aurora Award for best Canadian short SF and

Fiona Kelleghan

David Sandner

was a finalist for the Nebula Award. His next book, *Darwinia,* was out from Tor this past summer. He is tolerated by his large family and in his spare time he likes to repair and rebuild vacuum-tube electronics. An avid SF and fantasy reader for years, he still thinks writing fiction is a Cool Thing To Do. Contrary to rumor, he is occasionally seen by daylight.

Jeff Potter resides in beautiful Southeastern Massachusetts. Jeff's artwork currently appears in the film *Reasonable Doubt,* starring Melanie Griffith and Craig Sheffer.

Patrick Arrasmith is living in Brooklyn and attended the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco. He generally does editorial illustration and this is his first piece for *Realms of Fantasy.* Patrick has worked for *The Wall Street Journal,* and *The New York Times.* His artwork has appeared in The Society of Illustrators Annual, as well as *Step by Step.* He is currently at work on a project for *The Village Voice.*

Walter Valez has recently turned his talents to *Goosebumps* and *Dune* collectible trading cards, as well as TSR games and book covers. Velez' artwork is colorful, light-hearted, and witty, often painted on canvas. He is well-known for his *Thieves World* series cover art, and also the *Myth* series for Robert Asprin. Velez is currently travelling in Crete and this marks the first appearance of his art in *Realms.*

Eric Baker was born in Reno, Nevada but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia since 1970. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and is a graduate of Clarion '89. Eric sold his first story in 1992 but it was his third sale, "Uncertainty and the Dread Word Love," that appeared in print first. Kim Mohan published it in the antepenultimate issue of *Amazing* and Gardner Dozois gave it an honorable mention in the '93 *Best of the Year.* His work has also appeared in *F&SF, Asimov's,* and *SF Age.* Eric's first novel is from Penguin/Roc and is entitled *Checkmate.* It is in stores now. For the past year, Eric has been the full-time game reviewer for *Science Fiction Age* Magazine. He has written two modules for BRTC's *TimeLords* game system, one of which, "Supertanker of Death," is still in print.

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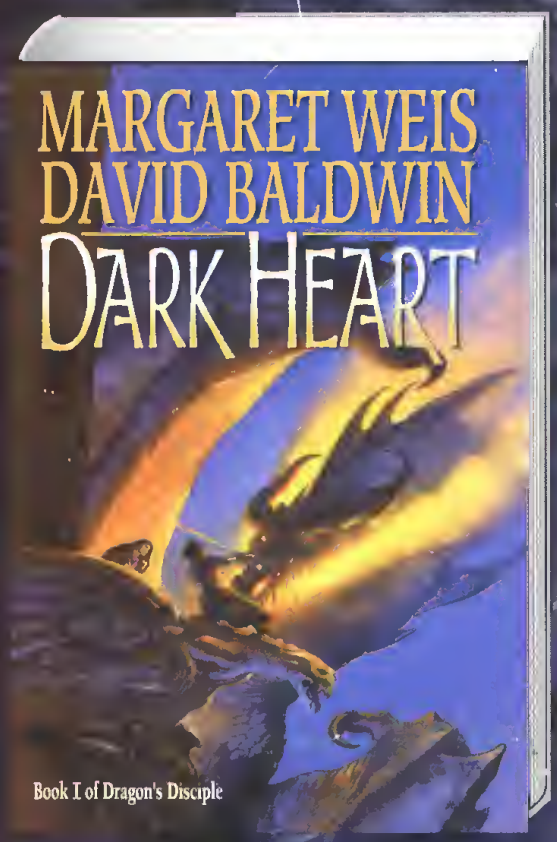

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